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BRIMELSEA

OR

CHARACTER THE INDEX OF FATE.

“ All are architects of Fate,
Working in these walls of Time.”

H. W. LONGFELLOW.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON :

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1857.

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A. 1

“Like unto ships far off at sea,
Outward, or homeward bound, are we;
Before, behind, and all around,
Floats and swings the horizon's bound,
Seems at its distant rim to rise
And climb the crystal wall of the skies,
And then again to turn and sink,
As if we could slide from its outer brink.
Ah! it is not the sea,
It is not the sea that sinks and shelves,
But ourselves
That rock and rise,
With endless and uneasy motion,
Now touching the very skies,
Now sinking into the depths of ocean.
Ah! if our souls but poise and swing,
Like the compass in its brazen ring,
Ever level and ever true
To the toil and the task we have to do;
We shall sail securely and safely reach
The fortunate isles, on whose shining beach
The sights we see and the sounds we hear
Will be those of joy and not of fear!”

H. W. LONGFELLOW.

TO

My Mother,

THIS BOOK

IS MOST AFFECTIONATELY

INSCRIBED.

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BRIMELSEA;

OR,

CHARACTER THE INDEX OF FATE.

CHAPTER I.

THE STORM.

It was night—deep, black night. Above, in the wide expanse of heaven, rolled the storm clouds; beneath, roared the boundless ocean, whose waves were lashed and goaded on to madness by the howling wind that swept across the sky. Woe to the mariner whose frail bark is struggling on a night like this; his life hangs on a thread; those straining beams will scarce live in such a gale, yet there is an Eye which watches over him, who hears on the distant shore the piteous cry of wife, mother, child, and though nought but sea and sky surrounds him, he is not alone, for One is ever near.

Hark! it thunders. Those black clouds part and pour forth their liquid fire in forked rays to meet the foaming surges; for an instant all around is

visible in the lurid glare ; sea, sea for miles — trackless, lonely in its solemn grandeur — heaving, tossing, foaming from time immemorial till the hour when God shall bid its waves be still. The seabird, affrighted at the sudden bursts of light, sweeps past, borne rather than flying with the wind. Another flash — another, and another, each one more vivid than the last ; the whole firmament seems on fire ; every object is illumined for miles around, and see, a black mass rolls and staggers on the turbid waves ; it sinks, it rises proudly, and the tall masts of a stately vessel are plainly visible against the sky. Onward it comes, propelled by the magic power of steam ; in vain the angry waves of the Bay of Biscay dance around their prey, lash and besprinkle it from bows to stern with foam ; the stately frigate shakes and totters, then rising on some cresting wave, shoots gallantly forward, bravely fighting with its deadly foe.

There are many human souls on board, many anxious eyes upturned towards the fiery heaven. “ God preserve us, and send us rain ! ” they cry, for not a drop had fallen from those louring clouds ; it seemed as though the wind forbade it, as it swept them wildly on. A flash, such as is rarely seen, forked serpentine from cloud to cloud, and dashed downwards to the sea — crash, crash roared the thunder, the air seemed rent in twain, the vessel reels upon the waves, they sweep from beneath it, and their cresting tops peer up mockingly as they dance away. Once more the gust comes whirling past with its resistless force, then all is still as death, the welcome rain-drops fall in torrents, the surges toss harmless, the lightning sports amid the clouds, the thunder murmurs

farther and farther off, till at length it is lost, the clouds break asunder, and the moon peeps down, fitfully at first, then brighter, clearer, till it reigns supreme; the raging elements are stilled—peace triumphs over war.

Onward flies the gallant vessel, driving before the wind; she has weathered the storm, and once more rides tranquilly on her course; the moon shines down upon her streaming planks—they look like silver in her light; the sailors hurry here and there; much is to be done; no rest for them that night. “Heave-a-hoy ’oy!” up go the sails, and flap and batter in the wind; the captain stands at his post; he has been there throughout the storm, his trumpet in his hand, but it is now no longer necessary; he is speaking to the first lieutenant who stands beside him. Let us approach and scrutinize them more narrowly, as both are to form actors in our drama. Now that the storm has lulled we have leisure to make their acquaintance—come, then, follow me.

Captain Roger Macklaren is a thorough English sailor in appearance; he is short and strongly made, as if accustomed to the rougher scenes life offers to some few of us. His manner is frank and generous; he is one of those open-hearted people who look on the whole world as their friend, and scarcely believe that such a thing as deceit exists. Though not handsome, his high forehead and large thoughtful eyes give him a distinguished appearance, more to be admired than actual beauty of feature.

His complexion is fair, though burnt somewhat red from exposure to the sun, and the expression of his whole countenance is grave, without, however, a tinge of melancholy; it is more the result of a

calm, well-regulated mind, and the habitual custom of thought, and, although devoid of poetry, it exhibits that more useful gift of common sense, so much needed in the every day concerns of life.

Lieutenant Lionel Holford was a young officer who had risen to his present standing in the navy more through interest than talent. He was the second son of a rich country squire; and, although untitled, the Holfords could boast as long a line of ancestors as any of the oldest peers of the realm. Sent to sea at an early age, Mr. Holford had but little attachment to his home; he was one of a large family; his elder brother was the favourite, and he had spent his youth more amongst the servants and in the stables than with his parents. His high spirit and impulsive manner were too much for the drawing-room, and, as he was often in the habit of saying himself, "his parents were glad to send him to sea that they might get rid of a nuisance." The rough life he had led, contact with the world, and the firm attachment he had formed to Captain Macklaren, all conduced to mould his character, and the wild boy grew into a brave and high-spirited man.

"We have had a very dirty night of it, but have come bravely through," said Mr. Holford, addressing his superior officer.

"Very little damage done, considering the severity of the storm," was the short reply.

"By Jove! I never saw such lightning," continued the other; "I thought the vessel would have been struck once or twice, but it whizzed over our heads and left us unscathed."

Captain Macklaren made no reply, and changing the subject, gave him some orders which the young

man promptly obeyed, leaving him to pace the deck alone. It was not his habit to enter into any conversation with his officers, and an attempt to draw him into one always failed, as in the present instance. His steps were measured, and only interrupted when he stopped to give some order, or to watch the proceedings of the men. To all appearance he was occupied with no painful thoughts, no private feelings, but intent only on what was passing around him. True, in time of danger the peril of those confided to his care engrossed his whole attention, yet his heart was swelling now with thoughts of home, for he was returning from a long banishment, returning to a mother he dearly loved, his only relation on earth. Bold and manly as he was, fearless of danger to himself, yet he quailed before the thought of his mother's sufferings if she knew he was in danger, he who was her only treasure, her "sunshine," as she used to call him; and as he walked, his eyes turned upwards to the clear sky above, and as in the hour of peril he had breathed an earnest prayer for mercy, so now he thanked God for having spared him to her.

His thoughts floated back to the time when he was a boy, and listened to his mother's tales of the brave deeds his father had done at sea (for he, too, had been a sailor), how he had fought for his country's honour, and had shed his life's blood in its cause. Well did he remember how his young blood boiled, and how from his earliest youth he had determined to go to sea; in vain his mother warned him of the trials and dangers such a life involved, the thoughts of these only added fresh ardour to his desire. "I will fight for England,"

once he said. "You do not forbid my being a sailor when my father has set me the example?"

"No," was the fond mother's reply; but who can tell how much it cost her to pronounce this little word, or how often her heart failed her, whilst listening to the raging winds, and thought that soon her only son would be exposed to all their fury? Yet she never withdrew that word.

Roger was sent to a naval college, and at fourteen took his first voyage to the Mediterranean. Well did he remember that parting—it was the first, and consequently the most bitter, he had ever experienced; each word, each look was engraven on his memory; and, even now, though he had grown old and hardened by contact with the world, he remembered with awe his mother's first farewell blessing, as she bade him cherish the early lessons he had been taught, and never be tempted to stray from the path of duty. How often had these words, spoken from the lips of love, checked some evil action, or caused the colour to mount to his cheek when he had done wrong. They had been his talisman through life, and now that he had but just escaped from danger, they recurred with double force to his mind.

"If she knew but half the perils I am subject to, how bitterly she would suffer," thought he; "but I doubt not a soft breeze was blowing at Brimelsea, whilst we were tossed and buffeted by a tempest—heaven grant it may have been so! A few more days, and I shall be at home." These, then, or somewhat similar, were the thoughts which occupied Captain Macklaren's mind as he paced the deck up and down, up and down the livelong night; but as the pale streak of morning tinged the

eastern sky with pink, he halted, and leaning over the bulwarks, he watched the conflict between light and dark: gradually did the gray dawn fight its way, till the whole firmament was filled with its cold light; then slowly rose the summer sun, like a globe of fire, from the watery horizon; higher and higher it ascended on its daily course; it shone forth warm and bright, and it was day.

CHAPTER II.

BRIMELSEA.

IT was a bright summer's morning, the sea lay like a sheet of glass, and its little waves dashed playfully on the beach of Brimelsea Bay. "We sport when it pleases us," they seemed to say; "but every one knows how majestic we can be when we choose." The white houses on the shore sparkled in the sunshine, and sweet strains of music floated on the air.

Brimelsea is a pretty watering-place, and very fashionable in the season—all the families of the county spend annually some weeks there, and it is a pretty sight, on the summer evenings, to see the parade crowded with well dressed people, walking up and down, listening to the German band. On this morning, however, the place looked deserted; a few children with their nurses or governesses were the sole occupants of the parade; ten o'clock is not a fashionable hour to be out walking, so we must seek the gay inhabitants in their houses. But let us first examine the place: facing the sea is a long row of large, fine-looking houses; this is

called Wilton Crescent, though in fact it has no right to the name, for it had been built in a straight line. These houses are the most fashionable in the town, though at one time Carlton Terrace claimed a superiority, as being higher and consequently more airy; but one year the cholera visited Brimelsea—no less than three houses in the terrace suffered from this fatal disease; the doctors threw out hints that the drainage was imperfect in that part of the town, and that the water was not good; so from that time Carlton Terrace fell into disrepute, and Wilton Crescent triumphed over its rival.

To the left, facing the parade, stands a white house all alone, a large green board hangs beneath the balcony on the drawing-room floor, and proclaims in golden letters that this is the Marine Boarding Establishment. It is a pleasant-looking house, and the sun is shining full upon it, as if to invite us to enter; let us do so, but not by the large oak door, with brass handle and knocker, but through that open window on the second floor, for it leads to a pretty little sitting-room, and its occupant is one whose acquaintance we must make. The walls are hung with pictures, and the neat gold frames contrast well with the pale green paper; on the table in the centre of the room are books and papers, reports of committee meetings and various charities.

There was no one in the apartment as we entered, but we have scarcely time to look around us before the door, leading to a bed-room within, opens, and an apparition meets our view, in the shape of a tall old lady with a kind, benevolent expression of countenance; but we have indeed intruded on her privacy, for in happy unconsciousness of being ob-

served, she had divested herself of a head encumbrance, and stood before us cap in hand, with the little curls of her "front" bobbing round her forehead in all their *natural* luxuriance, whilst the back of her head was clothed in a little brown silk cap. This was Miss Massing's usual costume when alone, but the much despised cap always lay somewhere near, that in case of an emergency it might be replaced in an instant; for, like most wearers of artificial hair, Miss Massing prided herself on her front, as being a most perfect deception, and nobody could possibly think it was, what it was—a wig. In spite of this, vanity, personal or otherwise, was very far from her simple character; she was as open as the day, kind and generous, always ready to think ill of herself and well of others; but unfortunately, being so accustomed to look down on herself, she never trusted to her own opinion, and always needed some one on whom to rely—some one to whom she could open her heart, and tell all its little troubles, and when deprived of a confidential friend she was not happy.

There are some lives which afford the greatest pleasure to contemplate, whose whole course has been a scene of unvarying repose, and whose goodness is above even the darts of malice and envy. Such a life as this Miss Lucy Massing had led; her character was like a ray of sunshine, bright and pure as a child. She had had her sorrows, it is true, but these were received in a meek and lowly spirit, and passed like fleeting clouds over the sunshine of her life.

"This is a world of trouble," she would say, with a smile; "we must all take our share, and it is well it should be so, for it makes us look forward

to a brighter home, where there is no sorrow, no parting, no pain."

Her early youth had been spent in a retired country village, ten miles from Brimelsea; her father was a clergyman and held the small living of the place; she had two sisters and a brother; her mother died before she could remember her, for she was the youngest of the family, and consequently the darling of all. At fourteen her brother entered the navy, and left his home for ever; he was drowned whilst far away, and but few particulars of his death ever reached England. This was a great sorrow to all the family; he was the only son, and great hopes had been formed for the success of his future career. Alice Massing, her eldest sister, married the son of a rich landholder in her father's parish; the younger likewise married, and Lucy Massing was then left sole mistress of the parsonage house, and continued to preside there till her father's death, when she was forced to seek another home. Her eldest sister offered her a welcome in her family, and she accepted it.

The years she spent at Merethorn Hall were very happy ones; she undertook to educate her little niece, Maud Erving, and the child's endearing ways won the heart of her aunt and instructress. Miss Massing felt that she had an object in life, had something dependent on her, something to love—it is a want every affectionate heart must have, and Miss Massing's was a warmly affectionate nature. Unfortunately, at this epoch in her life, she experienced another great affliction, which once more deprived her of a home and threw her on the world—her sister died in giving birth to her second child, and the infant followed its mother to the grave. Deeply

did Miss Massing deplore her loss ; but she was not one to give way to grief, and bestirring herself she looked out for another home, where she might engage in active duties, and be of use in her generation. It was naturally a difficult task which she had imposed on herself, and wishing well to mature her plans before she fixed on an abode, she determined to enter Miss Briggs's Boarding Establishment at Brimelsea for a few months, that she might look about her, and be better able to judge what station would best suit her.

Weeks passed by, months, nay years, came and went, but still Miss Massing remained an almost constant inmate of the Boarding House. She had made friends in the town ; had discovered a cousin in Lady Macklaren, to whom she had become greatly attached ; was in the habit of visiting among the poor ; formed one of the ladies' committee at the National Schools, and taught in them three times a week. Her time was fully occupied, Brimelsea had become her home, she had ties there which endeared the place to her, and although she might wish some few things altered in the Boarding House, still there was an independence in living in it which she liked ; she had no household troubles, was her own mistress, had her private sitting-room to which she could at any time withdraw, and all her little worldly property was around her.

Thus then it was that Miss Massing lived on at Brimelsea, and ten long years had elapsed since the time when she was an inmate of Merethorn Hall. Ten years work many changes : the young grow up, the middle-aged grow gray, the old die, and they had worked many bitter changes in the

Erving family. Mr. Erving had followed his wife to the grave, and Maud was left under the care of her uncle, a rich merchant, who then resided in London. She corresponded regularly with her aunt, for the attachment formed in early youth strengthened with age, and the memory of a kind, indulgent, loving face had left a pleasing impression on Maud's mind never to be effaced. With what yearning does the heart cleave to the bright memory of some friend in early youth! and though disappointment may in after years change those feelings, with regard to the actual being who inspired them, still that vision once formed in by-gone days, remains and clings around the sanctuary of the heart, as ivy does around some ancient spire of the house of God.

Maud Erving loved her aunt, though she had never seen her for ten long years, and it was with joy that she received her weekly letters, for that stiff, old-fashioned hand reminded her of home, as she always called Merethorn, and the expressions of love they invariably contained did that poor orphaned heart good, whilst they brought the tears to her clear blue eye. Maud had always been a delicate child, and increasing years had in no way lessened this tendency; the confinement of London did not agree with her, and she languished for want of pure country air and freedom. Her guardian was too much occupied to notice this, and his wife too ailing herself to think of others; they never left town for more than a few weeks together, and Maud was very frequently at her school at Kensington when these excursions were made.

How often had she pined for her old home, and the haunts whose beauty her childish recollection

had mirrored in such glowing colours on her mind! It was no wonder, then, that she clung to her aunt, as the only link left to her of the chain which bound her to her early childhood, and many an imposition she received at school for covering her copybooks with portraits of an elderly lady in spectacles and little black curls.

Maud was instructed in all those accomplishments requisite for a young lady of fortune, and was finally pronounced *finished* by Mademoiselle Lafoure, her mistress. She then returned to her uncle's house in Grosvenor Place, and prepared to make her *début* in society.

Tap, tap, tap! Some one is knocking at the door—Miss Massing hurriedly replaces her cap, but in doing so disarranges the equilibrium of her front, and the parting is in anything but the right place when the maid servant enters with a letter.

“The post is early this morning, is it not, Jane?”

“Well perhaps it is, ma'am, but Gelings brings the letters pretty reg'lar,”—the postman was a great admirer of Miss Jane.

“Ah, it is from Maud!” exclaimed Miss Massing to herself as she walked towards the window. Jane, who had remained to hear this announcement, withdrew—Miss Massing tore open the envelope, kissed the handwriting, and read as follows:

“Grosvenor Place.

“MY DEAR AUNT LUCY—You will be sorry to hear that my long silence has been caused by illness; you know how much you feared London gaieties would be too much for me—well, your prophesy has come true, though I confess I laughed

at your fears at first. Hot, crowded rooms do not agree with me, and ever since Easter I have been laid up with a kind of low fever; the doctors have now, however, pronounced me cured, but I still continue so weak and languid that I am recommended sea-air, or at all events a total change. My uncle is unable to leave London with his family at present, and as the *kind* doctors urge my immediate removal, he has consented to my putting myself under your care, and becoming an inmate of Miss Briggs's Establishment."

"Capital!" exclaimed Miss Massing, and then read on:

"This idea enchants me....."

"The dear, warm-hearted child!"

"...and I only hope you will enter into the arrangement with half the pleasure I do. What famous walks we will take together along the shore! I intend to become learned in seaweeds and zoophytes—it is quite the fashion now. Pray say nothing about the fever to the old ladies, or they will refuse to have me amongst them; it was nothing infectious I assure you, and was brought on purely by my state of health. Seeing your kind face again will remind me of happy days long gone; you do not know how often I pine for a home such as I once had, when dear papa was alive."

Miss Massing brushed a tear from her eye.

"My uncle is kind to me, but London life is not to my taste; besides, there are many circumstances connected with this family, which render a residence amongst them far from agreeable—my aunt is always ill, and the children do just what they please. Then my uncle is, I fear, jealous of me; he often throws out hints that my father wronged

him with regard to money matters, and this is of course excessively disagreeable for me to hear, especially when I reside under his roof. Oh, how I hate money! Never mind, I shall now soon be able to pour all my little sorrows into your willing ear, and it is better perhaps not to trust them on paper, especially as they may be regarded as family concerns.

“ You must promise to write to me as soon as possible, and name the day for my coming. I shall wait in great impatience to receive your reply, and trust with all my heart that it will be a favourable one. My French maid will accompany me.

“ Ever your attached niece,

“ MAUD ERVING.”

Miss Massing read the letter twice, folded it up carefully, replaced it in the envelope, looked at herself in the mirror over the fireplace, adjusted her wig with a good-humoured smile, opened the door, and descended the stairs to the landing below; here she turned to the right, and threw open a door directly in front. The hum of voices greeted her as she entered, for this was the public sitting-room, which was always tenanted by a great many ladies. Miss Massing gave a hasty glance around the apartment, and seeing a short, comely-looking woman perusing some letters at a table in the window, she advanced towards her, exclaiming—

“ I have good news to tell you, Miss Briggs.”

“ Indeed—what is it?”

“ I have found an occupant for your best bedroom, which was left vacant last week—a great heiress—can you guess who that is?”

“ What, your niece, Miss Massing?” ejaculated

the good-natured little woman, all radiant with smiles.

“None other.”

“Well to be sure! I’m glad to hear it for your sake; you have spoken so much about her to us, that I am quite curious to see her. But I trust Miss Erving will not find our plain, homely living distasteful to her.”

“I can answer for that, Miss Briggs; Maud is a good, unpretending girl, if she has grown up at all like her mother, and she promised to be the image of her when a child.”

“Children often disappoint one when they grow up,” remarked a pettish voice from the sofa, and Miss Massing turned to look at the speaker, who was reclining in the eastern style, a book on her knee and her head resting on her hand.

“I am aware of what you say, Mrs. Blount,” said Miss Massing, coldly; “but having constantly corresponded with Maud I feel as if I knew her character as well as I did her mother’s.”

Mrs. Blount was silent, but she gave her friend Miss Bridges a look which seemed to say, We shall see, all in good time. The latter personage was a shrivelled young lady (for so she still continued to consider herself), with a complexion resembling leather in colour and texture, large prominent eyes, and a mouth too well supplied with teeth. She was a great confidante of Mrs. Blount, for she upheld that lady’s dignity, in opposition to Miss Massing, for though Mrs. Blount had no private sitting-room, she had a bed-room on the first floor, and it was a constant subject of jealousy with her that Miss Briggs should give Miss Massing the precedence.

“ I, an Indian officer’s widow ! the descendant of a long line of ancestors (for who has not heard of the Neals of Monkby ?)—that I should be superseded by a paltry clergyman’s daughter, and all because she happens to have rich relations, and can afford to hire a private sitting-room ! It is shameful !” she would often ejaculate to her dear Miss Bridges, in private. “ I will leave this place to-morrow !” Then her friend would strive to pacify her, and to assure her that every one considered her far superior to Miss Massing in every way. This flattered Mrs. Blount’s self-conceit, and she never left Miss Briggs’s Establishment, though she often threatened to do so.

“ I cannot leave you, my kind friend ; we have formed a most tender intimacy—it must not be severed. I will suffer all this indignity to be with you ;” then the friends would kiss and consider each other injured mortals.

“ And now, ladies,” said Miss Briggs, advancing into the middle of the room, and looking very mysterious, “ I too have a piece of news to communicate.”

“ Indeed !” was the general exclamation.

“ Yes, we are going to have a gentleman visit us next week.”

“ A gentleman ?”

“ Ah, and a foreigner—a Mounseer Porskowsooski.”

“ Mr.....what ?” demanded Miss Bridges, somewhat eagerly.

“ Do not ask me to pronounce it again, you shall see the name written,” and she presented the letter to her.

“ Why, you left out his title, Miss Briggs,” said

she; "he is a Count—Count Porskinski—it is quite easy to pronounce."

"Do you find it so," remarked that lady; "for my part, I shall call him Pouncey."

"When does he propose coming?" asked Miss Massing.

"Next Monday."

"Ah, that is the day I intend to propose to my niece; I always like travelling on Monday myself, because then I pack on Friday and Saturday, and have Sunday as a rest between, and I can recollect if there is any little thing I have forgotten. Do you think this a good plan, Miss Briggs?"

"Yes, very; and it will be so pleasant to receive both our guests on Monday."

"I wonder if Count Porskinski is a young man, if he is married, or a widower," mused Miss Bridges. "He must be a Pole—a poor outcast from his country! Perhaps he will be melancholy and require amusing—I feel sorry for him already."

"What can we do to make Maud's room look cheerful?" asked Miss Massing, as she withdrew into the window with the lady of the house. "There is the portrait of her dear mother which hangs up in my room—we might take that down and place it over her chimneypiece; it will feel like coming home, to meet that smile as she enters her bed-room for the first time, and it will take off all the strangeness new rooms always have—do not you think so, Miss Briggs? I never feel happy in any new room, I miss old friends at every turn, and this makes me sigh. Maud must not learn to do it, for the habit once gained, it is a hard matter to get rid of it again. Did you ever sigh?"

"Just see how she listens to all her foolish

prattle," whispered Mrs. Blount to her confidante, Miss Bridges, as she pointed to the two figures in the window. "It is abominable for the mistress of an Establishment like this to give all her attention to one person—I must speak about it."

"Wait till the Polish gentleman arrives," suggested the other; "we will get him to complain for us—men always have more weight in such matters than we poor women."

"Thank you, Miss Briggs, for your good advice," said the innocent Miss Massing, emerging from the recess of the window. "I will go to my room and write to Maud directly. I quite long for Monday to come; it is so long since I saw that dear child's face!"

CHAPTER III.

THE ARRIVALS.

THE inmates of Miss Briggs's Establishment were of diverse religious persuasions: that lady herself was a worthy Dissenter, but of so mild and benevolent a character, that she never joined in the discussions and disputes that were perpetually arising amongst her lady inmates, who may be said to have been divided into three distinct parties—the upholders of high and low church, and the acknowledged Dissenters. Each had their favourite preacher, for there were two churches in the town, and, alas! many meeting-houses, as is always the case in seaside places. Mr. Montague, rector of the parish, was a staunch upholder of orthodoxy and rubrical observance; whilst, on the other hand, Mr. Pipkin, Incumbent of St. Mary's District Church, held highly Puritanical doctrines, preached extempore sermons, and, what rendered him still more popular, he had an interesting cough.

Miss Briggs dreaded the Sunday evenings, for hardly a week passed without some quarrel, arising over a sermon or a favourite preacher. Miss

Massing was a constant attendant at the parish church, and, save now and then when a passing visitor took up his or her abode amongst them, she was the only one who frequented it from that house. Far was it from her peaceable kind-hearted nature to begin a quarrel with any one, but she could not bear to hear good, zealous men abused, and if a word were breathed against Mr. Montague, the colour would mount to her cheeks, and she would enter the lists of combatants with all the zeal of an enthusiast.

“What a spiritual discourse we had this morning from Mr. Pipkin, had we not, Miss Bridges?” said Mrs. Blount, as they sat round the tea-table the following Sunday. “Such a flow of eloquence! it seems to pour in torrents from his mouth.”

“It was, indeed, a discourse full of Bible truths,” rejoined the younger lady; “it is quite a privilege to sit under him.”

“Yes, we are highly privileged. Did you notice the passage where he likened sin to a storm, and conversion to the sunshine that follows?”

“Sublime! his discourses are always very poetical.”

“Yes, the most impenetrable must feel their conscience pricked whilst listening to him; the greater pity it is he is not rector of this parish. There is something to be learnt from *his* sermons, whereas one might sit for years under another clergyman of our acquaintance—” here Mrs. Blount glanced at Miss Massing over her spectacles—“and never learn aught that is essential to one’s soul’s health.”

There was a dead silence, and the lady continued—“Talk of charity—the high church do not exercise *that* virtue, they rail at every one who is

not of their own persuasion, and think themselves *saints*—pretty saints, indeed!” Another look at Miss Massing, but she was busy eating a slice of bread and butter, and appeared perfectly indifferent to the conversation.

“Take Mr. Montague for instance—he spends all his money in decking out the walls of the dear old parish church with tawdry rubbish on the festivals, as he calls them, making a Protestant place of worship look like a Roman Catholic Chapel, and he never has a farthing to give to the Bible Society and such estimable charities.”

“Mr. Montague subscribes to other institutions,” said Miss Massing, quickly.

“And his hand is always shut against the poor,” continued Mrs. Blount. “There is Mary Burton, whose husband was drowned the other day, she went to him, but might have saved herself that trouble.”

“I am sorry you have been so ill informed,” remarked Miss Massing, again.

“Ill informed! I have my information from the very best authority; you do not, I hope, doubt Mr. Pipkin’s word?”

“I should be sorry to think he had uttered such an unwarrantable accusation.”

“I saw the woman myself.”

“And did she tell you that Mr. Montague promised to make inquiries in the matter, and, if he found her case a worthy one, he would assist her to the best of his power?”

“He might have assisted her at once,” said Mrs. Blount, vexed at finding herself in the wrong.

“You forget how much he is subject to imposture in a town like this.”

“I should think nothing of it had I but one solitary case to bring forward, but the truth of what I say is manifest; see how the poor desert him and put themselves under good Mr. Pipkin’s care—his church is crowded, whilst the other.....”

“I am excessively sorry to contradict you,” said Miss Massing, “but if you attended St. Michael’s you would find the accommodation scarcely adequate to the congregation.”

“The rich flock there to hear the singing,” suggested the other, spitefully.

“More than half the church is filled with sailors and their wives.”

“You omit the Irish population, who see so little difference between the ceremonies at St. Michael’s and their own church, that they attend first one and then the other.”

“I think if you were to inquire more closely with regard to this matter you would find that those Irish who do attend at St. Michael’s are converts to our faith.”

“Indeed! Mr. Pipkin tells a different story; he has converted some of the benighted Irish, it is true; but then he is so kind to them, he consults their wants, assists and comforts them. His earnest manner and spiritual life cannot fail to have weight with all who approach him; he never pollutes himself by going to balls and parties—no, he despises all such vanities, and treads them under his foot as St. George did the Dragon; but I grieve to say,” here she shook her head mournfully, “there are clergymen in this parish who do indulge in these vanities, whilst they neglect their duties.”

"I cannot imagine to whom you allude," said Miss Massing, becoming really vexed.

"Your own observation might tell you I speak of Mr. Montague."

"That is impossible, for a man who devotes his life to religious exercises, and the good of those entrusted to his care, cannot be accused of neglecting his duty. And, to tell the truth, Mrs. Blount, I think we should all be the better and happier if, instead of finding fault with others, we were to strive to imitate the good they do, and learn to reverence our clergy and not to abuse them." Miss Massing rose. "It is painful to me to speak in this way, but I cannot hear Mr. Montague thus abused, and not contradict the slander."

"Ladies, ladies!" interposed Miss Briggs, "we had better return to the drawing-room, if you have all finished tea."

That night Mrs. Blount swept out of the sitting-room without saying good night to any of the ladies present. Miss Massing was grieved that any one should let the sun go down on their wrath, especially when that wrath was against her, so following Mrs. Blount out of the room she confronted her in the passage.

"Let us part as friends," she said, holding out her hand.

"No, indeed," replied the other, tossing her head in the air, and taking a step forwards, "I have been insulted by you—an injury is not so easily forgotten as you may think, Miss Massing."

"If I have offended, I hope you will accept of an apology," said the kind-hearted old lady. "My words were doubtless hasty, they may have wounded deeper than I then intended—I am sorry....." again she held out her hand, but it was not taken. "Will

you not forgive me? We may not live to see another dawn—I like to lay my head to rest and think that I am at peace with all the world. Will you not grant me that pleasure?”

Her hand was taken, but the pressure was cold.

Miss Massing retired to her couch with happy thoughts of what her niece would be like; if she had grown up as handsome as she promised to be when she was a child, and used to play on her knee, stroke her cheeks, and call her dear Auntie Louchy. Mrs. Blount's head ached as she laid it on her pillow, and she felt vexed with all the world.

The following morning, Monday, was the day on which the new arrivals were expected, and the inmates of the Boarding House were all dressed in their best clothes to receive them. Miss Massing, who set fashion at defiance, and preferred comfort to show, took extra pains over her toilet that morning, and her very best gown—a black silk with sprigs of flowers—was selected as the one to be worn on this great occasion. It was made after her own pattern (indeed only one dressmaker in Brimelsea ever suited her taste), the skirt was short, the sleeves tight, and a cane-zou of Honiton lace half covered the body, whilst a neat frill around her neck served instead of a collar; she looked the picture of a kind old lady, but these eccentricities in dress made her the laughing-stock of her jealous enemies.

“I wonder what the heiress will think of her aunt,” whispered Mrs. Blount to Miss Bridges.

“She will laugh at her, as much as we do,” was the reply. Little did these worthy ladies know the heiress, if they thought she was like themselves.

Let us leave them to their conjectures awhile, and travel up to London in our imagination.

Thought travels quicker even than the electric wire !

The Station at London Bridge was crowded with people from all parts of the country ; some bound for the Continent ; some for a day's pleasuring in the green fields and pleasant lanes of Surrey —whilst others, principally ladies and their children, were starting for a three weeks' holiday to some seaside town. Amongst a group of the last mentioned travellers stood a tall, delicate-looking girl, waiting patiently till the time should come for the train to start ; she was turning over the leaves of a book she had just bought at the stall close by, and her head being somewhat bent she did not observe that she had unconsciously attracted the attention of a foreign-looking gentleman, likewise waiting for the train to start.

“ Mademoiselle Erving,” said a French maid, approaching her, “ I have chosen a carriage where there are no children, and if you are weary of waiting here you can enter it, as I have prepared all for you.”

The young lady rose from the bench on which she had seated herself, and, giving a shawl to her maid, entered the carriage that had been selected ; the foreign gentleman watched their movements. looked in at the window to see if a place were left vacant, and finding none walked off rather disconcerted. The first bell rang, every one rushed to their places, and nurses were seen hurrying along with children in their arms and others hanging to their dresses.

“ Here, Jane, be quick !” urged an anxious mother.

“ If you please, ma'am, Master Tom has got a sturdy fit, and won't move.”

“Carry him, then.”

“But he kicks so, ma’am,” said the disconsolate nurse.

Ting-a-ling-a-ling! there’s the second bell. “Take your seats, please, ladies,” and every one scrambled in, Master Tom kicking and screaming in the guard’s arms—an agreeable travelling companion!

Whizz! jerk—jerk! whizz! and away flies the train with all its living burden. Many a heart of sorrow and joy, hope, expectation and disappointment, is whirling with it—on, on, with the wings of the wind! May their sorrows vanish as quickly as yonder train does from our view!

After luncheon Miss Massing retired to her own sitting-room, there to wait in patience till her niece should arrive; every ring and knock at the front door made her start, and she spent the afternoon in looking out of the window, watching the comers and goers. Five o’clock struck.

“Maud ought to have arrived by this time; I told her our dinner hour was six. Dear me, dear me, she makes me anxious,” said the kind old lady as she paced the room. Just then the rumble of a carriage was heard in the street below—it stopped—Miss Massing rushed to the window. “It is a fly from the station, and there is luggage; it must be Maud!” and, without a moment’s hesitation, away she runs down stairs, desirous of being the first to welcome her niece. “I must be quick,” thought she, “the front door is open—Maud will be before me.” The ground floor is gained—the passage traversed—the sharp corner by the street door turned—“Oh!” Miss Massing encountered not Maud, but Count Porskinski, the Polish gentleman, who was likewise expected that day.

“I.....I beg your pardon, I mistook.....I.....”

The tall, moustached gentleman bowed; there was not a shadow of a smile upon his polite features as he witnessed Miss Massing's confusion.

"You are expecting a young lady from town," he said, in measured accents.

"Yes," whispered Miss Massing, only partially recovered from the shock she had received.

"She will be here in a moment, I heard her command the coachman to drive to this house. There was some delay about her luggage, but I have the felicity of telling you it is safe."

"Here she is!" ejaculated Miss Massing, as another fly drove up, and two female faces were seen at the window.

"Himmel! she is beautiful," murmured the Pole to himself. Another moment, and two long severed relations were clasped in a fond embrace, heedless of the eyes that gazed upon them.

"Is it possible! Is this my Maud? such a woman! how changed you are, and yet....."

"The same, dear aunt," said Maud, finishing the sentence, and kissing her again, "the same to you as when I played upon your knee."

"Reizend—charming!" murmured the spectator from behind.

"Perhaps, sir," said the maid, addressing him, "you would like to see Miss Briggs."

"Ye—yes," said he, rousing himself from the trance into which he had fallen. "Can I see her?—yes."

"If you will follow me, sir. Miss Briggs is upstairs;" the Count mechanically followed the maid, and in another minute stood surrounded by the lady inhabitants of the Boarding House. He paused in the doorway, and bowing low to those present, seemed doubting whom to address as Miss

Briggs, when that worthy little lady tripped up to meet him.

"Welcome, sir, most welcome to our Establishment. I trust you will find everything to your liking, though we are thoroughly English here."

"I am almost naturalized now," said the Count; "long absence from my country has weaned me from many of its peculiarities and prejudices. I wish to be regarded quite as one of you, for England is my adopted country."

"I knew he was an exile," thought Miss Bridges, eying the Count from her seat in the window. "How handsome he is, but dark for a German. He is just what I should have expected a patriot to be like. Ah, he has a wound across his forehead! Poor fellow, only think how he has bled for his country!"

"I must introduce you to some of the lady residents," said Miss Briggs. "Mrs. Blount, Count....." here she coughed, and fearing to commit an egregious error if she attempted to pronounce his name, the merry little woman merely mentioned that of the different ladies, and ignored the Count's altogether.

"Where is Miss Massing?" at length she exclaimed. "Has Miss Erving arrived?"

"There was noise enough down stairs for the arrival of ten heiresses, so I should think she has," said Mrs. Blount, pettishly.

"An heiress!" thought the Count. "Beautiful, and an heiress!"

A merry voice was heard near the door, and a ringing laugh from Miss Massing; the next instant the two entered arm in arm. Maud Erving looked very lovely as she stood, half frightened at the sight of so many strangers, a little behind her aunt;

her fair hair hung in curls around her pale, snow-white cheeks, and the deep blue eyes shot wistfully from beneath her somewhat overhanging brow, which gave them a thoughtful, anxious expression. A formal introduction was gone through, and then she retired to her chamber to prepare for dinner. Miss Massing followed her, would not believe she had all she wanted, ran in and out of the room for first one unnecessary thing, then another, made the French maid angry, because she would unpack, and finally carried Maud in triumph down to dinner.

“*Ma foi!*” exclaimed the Frenchwoman, as they quitted the room, “my young lady must be an angel to bear all that interference; but I am not one and I cannot; she must not meddle with me, or I..... Well, I will think about what I will do;” and thus saying, she busied herself with the necessary arrangements for Mademoiselle’s comfort, and unconsciously undid all that Miss Massing had done that morning. First the bed did not suit Miss Laurette’s fancy—it must stand where the sofa was; then the dressing-table had to be moved, whilst the looking-glass was pronounced to be most unbecoming, for in which ever way she turned it, it did in no way do justice to Miss Laurette’s very sallow complexion.

That night when Maud had dismissed her maid, and the house was still, she put out her light, stole to the window, threw back the curtain, undid the fastening and leaned out—the moon shone upon the wide expanse of sea before her, and the soft plash of the waves upon the shore sent a soothing sound to greet her. But Maud was very sorrowful; the meeting with her aunt after so many years of separation, reminded her of the happy days of her childhood, and the young heart sighed for the

father and mother it had lost, alas ! even before she could rightly appreciate the blessing of such near and tender relations.

Count Porskinski retired to his apartment, singing a national air, and thinking all the while—
“An heiress ! it is well I came to Brimelsea.”
An exile from his own country, with no employment, he had wandered from Rome to Paris seeking a means of subsistence, and had lived now by teaching German, now music, and occasionally by writing for newspapers, or correcting the press. Entertaining revolutionary principles, and having meddled in French politics, he received one day an official order to quit France within twenty-four hours, and had immediately turned his steps to England, the land of liberty, the refuge for all political exiles.

CHAPTER IV.

THE PROPOSED EXCURSION.

“WELL, Blanche, have you had enough of London gaiety?” asked a handsome-looking, middle-aged man, who sat somewhat listlessly in an armchair by the window of his library in Eaton Square, and addressing a young lady seated at the farther end of the room at her desk. “For my part, I am weary beyond measure of the eternal smoke, and long for a sea-breeze. Politics have gone to sleep since peace was concluded, there is nothing in the papers—literally nothing,” and he threw that mighty chronicle, *The Times*, with very little respect on the floor.

Blanche rose and approached him.

“I am ready to go, papa; I have been to ten balls within the last fortnight, so have had dancing enough for the rest of the summer. But where do you propose to go?”

“I do not know—let me see—well, fetch the map of Europe from the side table. We must choose a place where I can have good cruising in the yacht.”

“Shall I tell you where I should like to go?”

said his daughter, seating herself upon his knee, and playing with his glossy hair; "I want to go to Brimelsea."

"Brimelsea! what on earth makes you wish to go there?"

"Because my old school-fellow, Maud Erving, has gone there to recruit after her illness, and she would be a nice companion for me when you leave me, as of course you must sometimes."

"Brimelsea," repeated Lord Reynoldforde, thoughtfully; "there is a snug little harbour for our 'Firefly' there, and we can cruise about the coast, and run over to France and Holland. By heavens, Brimelsea is the place! we will go there, Blanche—let us be off as soon as possible," and father and daughter both sprang up, as if to begin the necessary preparations that very instant; but Lord Reynoldforde only walked to the fireplace, and standing before it as if it were still winter, and a fire burned in the grate, he said—

"I should like you to have an elderly person to be your companion as well as Maud, for I must ask some young fellow to accompany me....."

The door opened at that moment, and a smart liveried servant entered with a card. Lord Reynoldforde glanced at it, and said—

"Oh, show him in directly. By Jupiter! Blanche, this man will do very well....."

He had not time to say another word, for the servant returned followed by an elegant French dandy. Blanche's lip curled, and there was an evident expression of distaste in her manner, as she bowed to the new comer, a slight, well-made, little man, with quick movements, black sparkling eyes, and raven hair.

"Ah, Marquis, you are the very man I am look-

ing for," said the hearty noble, extending his hand to the Frenchman.

"You make me joyful, milord, you do indeed. How is it that you can use me?"

The Marquis de Montanvert was no proficient in the English language, and as Lord Reynoldforde had a perfect knowledge of French, having been educated in Paris, the conversation was continued in that language, and we shall here give the translation.

"We are thinking of leaving London as soon as possible....."

"I am *au désespoir!*" cried the Frenchman, taking a step back.

"And want you to go with us."

The Marquis sprang forwards exultingly—

"And whither?"

"On a yachting excursion; our head quarters will be Brimelsea."

"You enchant me," and he glanced at Blanche with his keen black eyes.

"I know you are as fond of the sea as I am," continued Lord Reynoldforde. "I have not forgotten our cruises in your yacht before I was married."

The Marquis winced, he was very anxious to be considered quite a young man, although he was but a few years the junior of his friend, and former schoolfellow, Lord Reynoldforde.

Blanche now advanced to her father, and asked permission to order the carriage, that she might visit her old schoolmistress, and see if, as the holidays commenced the following week, she would consent to accompany her on their excursion. Lord Reynoldforde consented, and Blanche bowing to the Marquis, turned to leave the room. She ordered

the carriage to be got ready, and then walked with stately steps up to her own apartment. No sooner had she reached it, however, than she locked the door with a trembling hand, and throwing herself into a chair, exclaimed—

“My mother’s dying words were, ‘Keep *him* from that man,’ and I have not done so. But how could I? he entered the room before I could say a word. Oh, is it impossible to prevent his accompanying us? My father never withdraws his word—he has asked ‘that man,’ and he will come. Oh, mother! I will watch—your life was one of watching, guarding; you left that legacy to your poor, weak daughter, a girl of seventeen—God grant her power to follow in your saint-like steps. I will watch, I will not leave him, I will keep him from gaming, from all that may stain his still noble name—yes, I.....and what am I, that I should say I will do this? He is a man, a designing man, and I a weak woman; but then there is virtue in my cause, virtue triumphs over evil—but my heart misgives me. I might have prevented this, if he had not entered so immediately, my father is so indulgent he would have listened to me then; but now all hope is over, the Marquis de Montanvert is tacked to us for the next month,” and she rose majestically; all appearance of weakness had fled in a moment, and a cold sneer played around that handsome mouth, whilst the large hazel eyes seemed to say, I will conquer or die!

There is something very fine in determination, it shows a character above the usual stamp, especially when the attainment of the object determined on is fraught with difficulty, and the undertaker is a young, unprotected girl, such as Blanche Farn-court. Young as she was, however, she had a

character fit to battle with the world ; her perception was quick, her judgment good, her resolution firm, and her pride indomitable—a dangerous trait, but one which fitted her to combat and conquer in positions where a less resolute person would sink, despair, and fail. Blanche never let herself suppose she could fail ; her character was stronger than her father's, and she had a great command over him ; she was his darling, she knew it, and returned his affection without being able to respect him.

Lord Reynoldforde's youth had been dissolute : he had made bad friends, and they led him astray into forbidden paths, which perhaps he would never have trodden but for them. Fortunately for him, ere he had sunk very far, he met with an angel in woman's form ; he loved her—they married—she led him away from temptation, guarded him from his associates, and having accomplished her appointed task on earth, lay down, and her bright spirit fled away to its native home in the skies. Lord Reynoldforde mourned his wife with a wild, passionate grief, but another being was by him—his child ; his wife's legacy was growing up by his side, and he loved it for the lost one's sake.

Blanche remembered her mother's dying words, breathed in the last kiss she had imprinted on her child's cheek—" Watch your father, love him with all your heart, and keep him from *that* man."

Young as she was then, she knew well to whom her mother alluded, and never saw the Marquis de Montanvert without feeling a strong aversion to him, though, to all outward appearance, he was a man to attract a young girl's admiration ; his address was engaging, he was amusing and never obtrusive in his attentions, but whenever he set foot

in her father's house, the words—"Keep him from that man," rang in Blanche's ears, and she put herself on her guard, resisted all his attentions to please her, and made herself purposely as disagreeable to him as she could.

The carriage was announced, Blanche descended to the hall, and there stood the Marquis upon the door-step, whispering some earnest words into her father's ear. On seeing her he stepped politely forward, and offered her his arm; she took it with evident signs of reluctance, and bowing coldly, was the next instant whirling rapidly to her old school. The years she had spent under the care of Mademoiselle Lafoure had been happy and peaceful; she looked back to them with pleasure, now that life with all its perplexities rose before and around her; each day showed her more plainly that her path was not destined to be strewn with roses, that though she was the daughter of a rich lord her struggles would be great, and her heart often ached at the thought of the possibility of what her future might be.

At length the carriage drew up before a large door—the footman knocked. What a familiar sound that was to her! how often when a child had she peeped behind those red curtains in the dining-room to see who the visitor might be! Blanche smiled as these thoughts recurred to her. A man-servant opened the door—Mademoiselle Lafoure was at home. Blanche followed him up into the drawing-room, and as she entered caught sight of a retreating figure, making its escape by another door. The piano was open, Blanche knew what the figure had been doing—she had herself often slipped out of that door; but now she was the visitor, the grown-up person she had always looked up to with such

awe ; she was the lady of consequence Mademoiselle Lafoure would change her cap and smooth down her dress to see—how strange it felt ! she could scarcely help glancing in the mirror to see if she were the same or not.

“ *Ma chère petite !*” exclaimed a voice behind her, “ this visit gives me so much pleasure. How blooming you look !” The person who spoke thus was Mademoiselle Lafoure, a thorough French lady in appearance, dressed in black silk, with a pretty little coquettish lace cap perched on the back of her head.

“ Ah, and I have come to carry you off,” said Blanche, kissing her on each cheek. “ You must not refuse me—the holidays begin to-morrow, I know, and you are to spend them with me, dear Mademoiselle.”

“ You take my breath away ; I have so much business, so much to think about—tell me more clearly what you mean,” and the Frenchwoman clasped her head playfully with both hands. Blanche took hold of them and held them fast.

“ See, I have caught you, and can lead you where I like.”

They both went to the sofa and sat down.

“ Now for my explanation,” continued Blanche. “ The important matter is this, that I want your society ; we are going to spend the summer at Brimelsea, the yacht is to lie in the harbour, we are to take coasting cruises, exploring voyages to the Polar Seas, and.....”

“ Ah, stop, stop !” exclaimed the Frenchwoman, making a piteous face. “ And am I, poor Mademoiselle Lafoure, to be carried about the world, whether I will or no, in a yacht ?”

“ Yes, to be sure,” said Blanche merrily ; “ it

will do you so much good, you will come back to London refreshed, and will be able to rule the young ladies ten times better. I know you will not refuse me, your old pupil, who is in search of a friend—a protector,” added Blanche, gravely.

“Hey day! you must give me time to think about it. I can send my answer this evening.”

“No, I must have it now; papa has asked a friend to accompany us, and I will not go without you, I shall want your help. Papa’s friend is the Marquis de Montanvert.”

The countenance of the Frenchwoman changed, and she said, seriously—

“Poor child! I will go.”

“Do not call me poor,” cried Blanche, “I have gained your consent, and am as happy as the queen.”

Thus saying she sprang up, kissed Mademoiselle Lafoure, and was out of the door before the Frenchwoman could call after her.

“Tell your mistress that I will write her a letter, with all particulars, this evening,” said Blanche to the servant, as she passed out of the house.

That evening, after dinner, the father and daughter were seated together in the small drawing-room of their magnificent London house. Blanche had her hand in his, and was looking imploringly into his face.

“Do not go to-night, father, we have so much to talk about. I want your advice about many things.”

“I must, child, I have an appointment.”

“May I ask with whom?” said Blanche, earnestly.

“It is nothing that will interest you, girl, but an appointment must be kept. You, who are such a business-like woman, ought not to detain me.”

“ If it is business, I would not for a moment, but I feared.....” A blush overspread her countenance.

“ Feared what, child?” asked he, frowning. “ Am I not old enough to take care of myself?”

“ Yes, yes ; I did not mean that. Oh, father,” and throwing herself into his arms, she said, “ I love you so much.”

“ What does all this nonsense mean, Blanche? You do not generally act such tragic scenes as this.”

“ No, thank heaven ! I have not often occasion to do so. But remember, father, you are my all ; I am motherless ; I have no ear into which to pour out my griefs and fears but yours. Will you not stay with me to-night?”

“ I cannot,” said he, drawing his hand across his eyes, and turning from her. “ You are unreasonable—I will promise to hear all you have to say to-morrow, but not now. Montanvert is waiting at the club to talk over our excursion—I must go.”

“ Oh, father, that man is false !” cried Blanche, wildly. “ He is not a friend to you, he is wicked !”

“ How do you know that?” said Lord Reynoldforde, angrily, to his daughter. “ Do you suppose I should introduce him to you if he were an improper person? I am astonished at you, Blanche. There, take these keys, lock up the drawers you find open, and go to bed, I shall be late most likely to-night,” and without turning to look at his daughter, the man, strong in his own estimation, but so weak in reality, left the room.

Blanche sat gazing before her into space. The window was open, and heaven stretched bright and pure above the abodes of vice, misery, wealth, and

dissipation, whilst the moon shone serenely down upon the vast city of London.

“ Mother, I have done my best, do not reproach your child because she.....failed !” And tears started to the proud girl’s eyes. Her first attempt had failed.

The Marquis de Montanvert, after leaving his friend Lord Reynoldforde, that morning, returned to his lodgings, and there was a self-satisfied smile on his sinister countenance as he opened the door of his well-furnished apartments. Walking up to the table in the centre of the room, he turned over some of the books lying there, and looked at their gold lettered titles ; but it was evidently a mere mechanical movement, for the smile still played around his mouth, and there could be nothing in the plain bindings of “ Monte Christo,” and “ Les Frères Corses,” to call it forth. No ; the Marquis was busied in his own thoughts, and they breathed, alas ! nothing good respecting Lord Reynoldforde and his beautiful daughter Blanche.

“ How I shall triumph, when that proud girl bends before me, entreats me to permit her to do this and that. Entreaty adds beauty to a handsome face ; I shall enjoy seeing those eyes turn to me in supplication, when she is my wife.” And the Marquis threw the book he held in his hand with force upon the table. “ Wife ! hey, wife she shall be, and her rich dowry mine !”

“ What is the matter with you ?” said a voice behind him.

“ Nothing,” rejoined the Marquis, looking quickly round, and confronting a friend of the same nation as himself.

“ Men do not throw books about in general,” continued the intruder.

“ Le diable ! how did you come here ? ”

“ I followed you,” was the laconic reply.

“ And what for ! ”

“ To speak with you.”

“ Well, be seated then, and let me hear what you have got to say,” said the Marquis, pushing a chair towards his visitor in an irritated manner.

“ I come to ask you what the news is, and when the marriage is to take place.”

“ What marriage ? ”

“ Why, yours ; I have been looking out for it day after day. Take care, I have not forgotten our accounts ; a man does not easily forget three thousand pounds ; ” and he laid a stress upon the words.

The Marquis, who was well aware his gambling debts to this man amounted to that sum, thought it best to conciliate him, and said, drawing his chair in a confidential manner close to his—

“ I shall be married to Blanche Farncourt in the month of August, here is my hand upon it.”

“ What will you bet me ? ”

“ A hundred pounds.”

“ Done,” and the man took out his pocket-book and made a memorandum of the affair.

“ To show the intimate terms I am on with the family,” the Marquis went on say, “ I must inform you of a few facts.”

His friend nodded.

“ In the first place, Lord Reynoldforde is coming here to-night ; in the second, I am going to spend the summer with them.”

“ It is false,” said the other, firmly.

“ Deny it, if you can ; or, if you do not believe my testimony, come here this evening at nine o'clock, and hear it from the best authority, the

Baron himself." Here he paused, and then lowering his voice to a whisper, he continued, " I have my own way now the lady is dead ; she was my enemy, but she has gone to her account, and the Baron is as easy to twist as this piece of paper," and he gave an illustration with a letter that lay on the table. " Ha, ha ! these English milords are right good-humoured fellows ; it is very pleasant to get rich at their expense."

" At their daughters' expense," suggested the other.

" Ah, Mademoiselle Blanche is an angel ! But mind you (this is of course private), I shall have to curb her temper !"

" Not a little, *when* you catch her," said the other, knowingly.

CHAPTER V.

THE BOARDING-HOUSE.

MAUD ERVING was naturally of a happy, buoyant disposition, and the gloom which old memories had cast upon her spirits, when last we saw her, soon passed away, and left no trace upon her fair brow the following morning, as she descended to breakfast.

Mrs. Blount was indisposed (a very common occurrence), and did not appear at the morning meal; Miss Bridges was excessively active in cutting bread and butter, and flew two or three times up stairs, to inquire if her dear friend had any possible want; whether her tea were sweet enough, or if she could bring her up a little buttered toast, a little jelly, or the least drop of brandy to put in her tea, it was so good for languor, she knew so well what Mrs. Blount felt; had felt the same symptoms a hundred times herself; would do anything in the world to alleviate them. Could not Mrs. Blount find something she, her devoted friend, might do for her? It would give her so much pleasure to be of the slightest use. We grieve to say affection for her friend was not the sole motive that

prompted Miss Bridges to these acts of kindness. No ; there was a deeper meaning in what she did, for she was anxious to show Count Porskinski how indefatigable she could be in doing kind actions for those she loved.

Unfortunately, her exertions were superfluous—that gentleman was unworthy of such indirect attentions ; he, alas ! never thought twice about what Miss Bridges was doing, for he sat beside Maud Erving, and they had entered into a dispute over favourite authors : Maud preferred Schiller to Goethe, and the Count strove in vain to persuade her she was wrong. The discussion grew warm ; he quoted passage after passage, and finally ended by making Maud consent to listen whilst he read selections from Goethe aloud to her.

“ What can have happened to Miss Bridges ! ” said Miss Massing, to the lady of the house, as she disappeared for the fourth time.

“ She is anxious about her friend, I suppose, ” was the reply. “ There is no occasion for it, however, as Mrs. Blount’s indispositions are generally more than half imaginary. Now, Miss Massing, I want to talk to you about a little plan I arranged in my bed last night, ” and she lowered her voice to a confidential whisper. “ I thought it would be very nice to have a little tea-drinking in honour of the new comers—both such young people, you know—a little variety would be good for them ; and I said to myself, There is Miss Carpenter and her brother might be asked ; then, as they are your friends, I tried to think of some one whom it would please Mrs. Blount and Miss Bridges to see, and, as I turned over several names in my head, I fixed upon Mr. Pipkin, their favourite preacher, you know.”

“What, Miss Carpenter and Mr. Pipkin to meet together!” cried Miss Massing; “two people of such opposite views will fight, indeed they will.”

“They need not talk to each other—I will arrange it all. Miss Bridges shall play at chess in the window with Mr. Pipkin, and Miss Carpenter shall sit on the sofa and chat with your niece; they will like each other, I feel sure, and it will be very nice for her to make a few friends in Brimelsea, do you not think so, Miss Massing?”

“Yes, decidedly; I did intend introducing Maud to Lydia Carpenter, for I knew what a nice companion she would be to her, and your scheme is a very pleasant one for their first introduction. When did you propose asking them?”

“The day after to-morrow; it cannot be sooner, as to-night Mr. Pipkin has a prayer meeting, and to-morrow his district ladies meet at his house, drink tea, and, from what I hear, talk scandal. They say his wife is never present, but that she sits all alone by her drawing-room window, reading or working, whilst her husband is surrounded by ‘his ladies’ (as they are called). I do not know how much business they transact, but they tell me Mr. Pipkin receives a great many presents on these Thursday evenings.”

“Oh, Miss Briggs!” said Miss Massing, somewhat shocked; “it is not like you to speak in this way.”

“No, I am aware of that; but I feel so sorry for his poor wife, she cannot help being a little jealous of these ladies.”

“She might be a district visitor if she liked, I suppose, and then she would make one at the meetings,” suggested Miss Massing.

“No, indeed, you mistake, Mr. Pipkin does not

approve of married ladies joining their body; he considers they have enough to do at home, and Mrs. Pipkin is set up as a model wife. Poor thing, many a lonely hour she has! I do not fancy there are many women who would like to be model wives, if that is to be the sort of life they lead."

Miss Bridges entered the room at this juncture, and the plan of the proposed tea-party was communicated to her; her eye brightened at the thought of entertaining Mr. Pipkin, but when Miss Carpenter's name was mentioned, she looked scornful, and remarked in a superior woman tone of voice—

"You had better invite Miss Smith, the National school mistress, they are sworn friends, and Mr. Carpenter would be infinitely obliged to you, Miss Briggs."

A pause followed this speech, and then Miss Massing said, calmly—

"You are in the wrong, Miss Bridges, indeed you are. I do not know a more aimable, kind-hearted person than Lydia Carpenter, and I feel sure her conduct towards Miss Smith is actuated purely from kind feelings. A person of such good education as our school mistress must necessarily be isolated. She is above her own station, and cannot associate with us. Lydia takes compassion on her, and has made her a friend."

"All very well, but I prophesy," here Miss Bridges looked extremely wise, "that Miss Smith will one day become Mrs. Carpenter."

"Do not let us foresee evil," said Miss Briggs; "I must say I admire Miss Carpenter for her kindness in this instance, and we will hope she may never have occasion to regret what she has done."

“ We may hope in vain,” and the ill-natured Miss Bridges walked out of the room, encountering the maid at the door bringing in a note for Miss Massing. A man servant was waiting for an answer, and Miss Massing hastily broke the seal.

“ Come to me,” were the first words that greeted her eye, and she looked eagerly for what should follow—“ Come as soon as you can, you have shared my anxieties and fears, come and share my joy—Roger, my son, has returned.

“ Ever your affectionate cousin and friend,

“ LEONORA MACKLAREN.”

“ Oh ! what joy, what great joy !” exclaimed the kind-hearted old lady, fully sympathizing in the mother’s feelings. “ I will go directly. Maud, dear,” and turning towards her niece, she was greeted with the following lines of Schiller, totally incomprehensible to her :—

Dort, wo die grauen Nebelberge ragen,
Fängt meines Reiches Gränze an,
Und diese Wolken, die nach Mittag jagen,
Sie suchen Frankreichs fernen Ocean.
Eilende Wolken, Segler der Lüfte !
Wer mit euch wanderte, mit euch schiffte !
Grüszet mir freundlich mein Jugendland !
Ich bin gefangen, ich bin in Banden,
Ach, ich hab’ keinen andern gesandten.’

TRANSLATION.

Round me heaven spreads its glorious canopy,
Free roves my sight through space’s boundless reign,
Yon clouds, that roll their misty shapes on high,
Come from my ancient kingdom’s loved domain.
And southward as they move in mazy dance,
Fly towards the lovely coasts of France.
Ye happy clouds, that so gaily and fleet
Play your gambols in upper air,
Oh greet me the land of my childhood sweet,
For I am in bondage here !

Maud's voice sounded soft and sweet as she pronounced the words in her pretty German; her cheek was flushed and her eye bright, as if she felt herself in Mary Stuart's place, and her heart bled for the captive queen. Count Porskinski gazed at her in admiration, and when she finished he exclaimed—

“ You almost make me give up my point—Schiller never had a more powerful advocate.”

Maud smiled, and he continued—

“ The tone of your voice has stirred up wild sensations in my breast, sensations that have long been dormant. Oh! that yearning for home, for the country of our birth, it steals into the heart and unmans one. Bondage, surely it is an exile's fate to be in bondage, for he is severed from all he loves, is imprisoned in a foreign country far from home! Poland, the poor unhappy land of my birth, would that this hand could free thee from the tyrant whose hard yoke binds thy sons in the dust! But I am helpless, yon fleeting clouds can look down on thee and weep, ay, heavy drops of agony for thy banished sons, for thy fallen greatness, and I must stand afar, viewing thy misfortunes, unable to raise a hand to save thee from destruction. Freedom is a noble word, shall its blessings never shine on Poland's sons?”

“ Do not despair,” said Maud, touched by this outburst of patriotism. “ The tyrant lives but for a short time, the sun of liberty has not set for ever on your native land.”

“ Thanks, a thousand thanks, for those consoling words,” cried the Count, seizing her hand. “ You give me fresh hope—life seems to smile on me again.”

“ Maud, Maud!” exclaimed Miss Massing. “ If you have done your breakfast, we will go out.

I am going to call on a friend, and should like to introduce you to her."

"Very well, aunt, I am ready," was the reply; then turning to the Count, she added, "We must talk about Poland again at some future time, I take great interest in your ill-used nation. Will you tell me more about it?"

"I could never tire of such a theme; my only fear is I shall weary you with the recital of our woes—an enthusiast is always carried away by his own thoughts; you must promise to check me when I get too far."

"I can safely make that promise; you could not weary me, when Poland is the subject of your enthusiasm. The very word tyranny makes my blood boil, and believe me, my constant prayer is that every nation may one day enjoy the freedom of our highly-favoured England."

"Thank you," said the Count, solemnly, and the next instant Maud had quitted the room in company with her aunt.

Captain Macklaren, whom we last saw leaning over the bulwarks of his vessel watching the rising sun, had now reached England. He did not tarry a moment longer at Portsmouth than was necessary, but hastened to give in person the joyful news of his safe arrival to his anxious mother.

It was a calm summer's evening, the sun was sinking behind the gray rocks that bounded the view to the west, and an old lady sat in a balcony in Wilton Crescent, watching the varying colours upon land and sea; she was slight, and her movements still retained some of the grace of youth, though the elasticity was gone; her features were marked, but they bore an expression of pain, and her sunken eyes gazed more frequently at the white

spreading sails of the vessels on the far horizon, than at the glowing tints of the setting sun. The soft breeze fanned her pale cheek, and ruffled the lace of the cap, which encircled her snow-white hair. The tones of military music struck on her ear; she listened—it came nearer and nearer, the tune was a joyful one, it was not suited to the peaceful scene, and she was glad when the band had passed by and the air was still again. Now the sun had disappeared behind the cliff, and the shore was wrapt in the gloom of twilight, whilst the sea still sparkled in its rays; fainter and fainter they grew, till at length the white sail of a distant vessel alone rejoiced in sunshine—like a diamond it glittered brightly for a moment, then all was gone.

The old lady rose, clasped her hands, and with tears trembling in her eyes, she said, in a low, impressive tone—

“Thank God, he will return; yon sparkling sail bids me hope, I believe it firmly.....”

“Mother!” said a manly voice close to her.

She turned, a ray of inexpressible happiness shot over that calm face—“My son”—and two loving hearts were re-united in a fond embrace.

Absence is full of pain, but the ecstasy of meeting eclipses the sorrow of years, and hours of anguish are forgotten in one moment of bliss.

CHAPTER VI.

THE MEETING.

“MAUD, dear,” said Miss Massing to her niece, as they sauntered slowly along the beach towards Wilton Crescent, “I am going to introduce you to an old friend of mine, Lady Macklaren; she has been very kind to me, and we are on most intimate terms. I received a little note from her this morning, telling me her son has returned, and begging me to come and participate in her joy; that is the reason I disturbed your German lesson—by the by, child, how beautifully you speak that language, you have all the fluency of a native—I was quite astonished.”

“I think you must have been listening when I was in the act of quoting Schiller,” said Maud, modestly.

“Well, that may be, seeing it is all gibberish alike to me. You must be very civil to Captain Macklaren, Maud,” continued Miss Massing, gravely; “he is a most amiable, excellent young man. I expect all the ladies will be running after him, now he has come home.”

“If you think he is likely to be of your opinion on that point, I will wait out here till you have

made your call, dear aunt. I cannot allow young gentlemen to imagine Maud Erving condescends to run after them."

"Oh no, no such thing, it was only my nonsense; besides, no one would expect you, with your large fortune, to be seeking for a husband."

"I should hope not; but I do not see what my fortune has to do with the matter, unless you mean to imply that the gentlemen run after it."

"Of course they do, men are very mercenary; keep out of their way, Maud, as I have done; it is far the best. You see I am as free as those playful seagulls out there; I can do what I like, and go where I like."

"And yet, Aunt Lucy, you are often wishing you had some one to look after you, and keep you right."

"Yes, that is true, I do miss a kind friend to depend upon now and then, some one who would give me good advice and set me right, for I make great mistakes, and business matters puzzle me. I have no head for it."

"Now, if I could find you a nice old man, some one you might nurse and read to—would not that be the very husband for you, dear aunt Lucy?"

The old lady held up her hands exclaiming—
"Husband! it is for me to find one for you; old women like myself have given up all such....."

"Follies," suggested Maud.

"You are quite one of the oddities," said her aunt, laughing. "But here we are at No. 9."

They were admitted and ushered up into the drawing-room, and as they entered Lady Macklaren sat in her arm-chair by the window, with her son beside her, his arm resting on the back of her seat, whilst they both perused the same book.

"I have got to the end of the page, mother," said he, "and am dying to know what can possibly follow, and it....."

"You shall see, only have a minute's patience, Roger."

"I do not possess that highly essential quality, mother ; please let me peep."

"You great schoolboy....."

"Miss Massing, Miss Erving," shouted the servant in his loudest tone, to attract the attention of his mistress, which he succeeded in doing, for she turned round exclaiming—

"Here you are at last ; I have been expecting you every instant. Let me introduce you to my newly found son—Miss Erving, my son. I need not tell you, Miss Massing, how happy I am to-day, and how well this repays me for the hours of anguish I have passed."

Captain Macklaren looked at his mother tenderly ; it was a pleasant sight to see that strong man's love and reverence for her. Miss Massing poured forth a torrent of congratulations, they were received gratefully, and many pretty speeches followed. Maud could take no share in this, so looking about, her eye was attracted to the books lying on the round table. The first one that met her eye was a Finchley Manual, the second, "Enquire Within upon Everything," and, as she turned over the leaves of the latter, she was much entertained at the fund of useful knowledge huddled together in so small a space—"Hair Wash," "Breach of Promise of Marriage," "How to make Blacking," &c., all classed together. Maud became interested in the book, and Lady Macklaren had to address her twice before she heard her speak.

"Do you intend making a long stay in Brimel-

sea?" was the simple and most universally adopted question.

"Yes, I trust so," was the reply; "provided my aunt does not get tired of me," she added, smiling.

"You live in London, I think?"

"Yes, with my guardian, but it does not agree with me, and I feel much better for sea air already."

"Are you fond of boating?" asked Captain Macklaren, drawing his chair closer to hers.

"I am ashamed to say I am such a land-lubber that I have never so much as been on the sea."

The sailor smiled. "Then you must make a trial of it whilst you are here."

"We must choose a very calm day; when the sea is like glass, and I have no chance of being made uncomfortable or drowned."

"I think you are wrong in imagining calm weather less trying than rough. For my part, though I am well-seasoned to such things now, I own that when I have had any tendency to sea-sickness, it has been in calm weather, when the sun is hot, the breeze, if any, sultry, and when there is sufficient ground swell to make small boats rock gently."

"I foresee that I had better remain a land-lubber all my life, and not attempt the sea at all. When I came here, however, I had a great desire to collect zoophytes, and I am told that the best are to be obtained by dredging."

"You take an interest in natural history, then, Miss Erving?"

"Yes; I am fond of collecting, but am not learned in any particular branch; having spent the greater part of my life in London I have only learnt from books, never from nature."

“ You will find a great deal to interest you on the shore, and, if you will permit me, I shall be most happy to share the results of my dredging with you. I have studied this branch of science for long, and find great interest in it. You must help me to make an aquarium.”

“ With the greatest pleasure. I am delighted to have found some one who can instruct me a little ; you will find me very stupid ; I have the dullest comprehension imaginable.”

“ Are you a botanist ? ”

“ When I have the good fortune to be in the country I am.”

“ How you must long to travel,” said he, looking at Maud with evident admiration.

“ What makes you think so ? ”

“ Any one with such a love for nature must wish to see it under all its aspects.”

“ No, you are mistaken with regard to me ; I have no wish beyond a country home ; my idea of perfect happiness is a pretty cottage all covered with roses, a garden beautifully laid out, with fields and richly-wooded country all around it.”

Captain Macklaren smiled. “ You have no wish to see the flowers you so much admire, in all their perfection, flourishing beneath a tropical sun ? ”

“ None,” said she positively. “ To my eyes the modest flowers of our green woods and shady country lanes have more attractions than the specimens that are brought from foreign lands ; there is the same marvellous organization in the daisy as there is in the finest orchid of which the tropics can boast.”

“ You would change your opinion if you were to see the flowers of which you speak growing

naturally. You must remember that as yet you have only seen them in green-houses."

"I am never likely to see them anywhere else," said Maud, thoughtfully, "and as I am inexperienced and know nothing, whereas you have travelled and studied deeply, I doubt not I am in the wrong, though I cannot get rid of my prejudice."

"Do not try," he said eagerly, "I admire your feeling."

"We shall not fight over zoophytes, I think," said Maud, peeping up at him from behind her fair curls.

"No, I am sure we shall not."

"Unless we fight over some rare specimen which each will wish to possess."

"What are you talking about so earnestly?" asked Miss Massing, who had been engrossed in a conversation with Lady Macklaren, and had forgotten the existence of her niece.

"Captain Macklaren has promised to assist me in my studies," said Maud, laughing; "I am going to be a regular blue-stocking, aunt; my guardian will be frightened of me when I return to London, and will wish me married and settled."

"What are you going to set about?"

"Collecting zoophytes, and becoming a naturalist in general."

"Oh, I trust you will not encourage her in any such cruel pursuits," said Miss Massing, turning to Captain Macklaren.

"Why cruel?" he asked.

"To kill any creature for mere pleasure, or to gratify a foolish curiosity, is cruel."

"But for the advancement of science," suggested he.

Miss Massing raised both her hands as was her custom when she could not continue an argument, and said—

“What can Maud do to advance science?”

“Every little helps, and great things have often little beginnings. Miss Erving takes up this pursuit as an agreeable method of passing her time, perhaps some suggestion of hers may give rise to deeper speculations and investigations on the part of some one who enters into the science more systematically, and her simple suggestion may be the means of a great discovery in natural history. All this is possible, so you must not hinder us from beginning the work in good earnest. We have agreed that I shall be the dredger, and she the land collector.”

“You must assist me, Aunt Lucy,” said Maud.

“What, to kill the poor things?”

“No, to be kind to them, and keep them alive.”

“If that is all, I have no objections.”

“We must get Miss Briggs to give us all her spare foot-baths and basins. I will arrange them on the floor in my room, and we will employ some old person to bring us sea-water.”

“My dear Maud, Miss Briggs will think you quite mad.”

“What does that matter? if she likes, I will teach her the hard names as a recompense for giving me the baths. I quite long to set to work; can we not begin to-day? the tide is low, and we have not had our walk.”

This proposal was agreed to, and Lady Macklaren and her son accompanied them to the beach. The two naturalists were soon busily engaged, with no eyes or ears for anything but for themselves, and the object of their search. “What have I

found?" "Here is a treasure!" "That is very common, we shall find a great many of that species," and such like expressions, were uttered from time to time; the old ladies were therefore left to themselves, and after a few knowing looks at the young people, and an involuntary smile not intended to be noticed, their eyes encountered, and they perceived they were thinking of the same thing. Miss Massing was the first to speak.

"They seem to be very much interested in this pursuit, I have no doubt they will be *great friends*. Maud never had a brother."

"Similarity of tastes always unites people." Again they looked at each other and smiled.

"Do you think we ought to encourage this intimacy?" asked Lady Macklaren.

"Why not?" demanded the other.

"Because.....because it may lead to something else."

"Oh!" and Miss Massing paused. "You are more experienced in the ways of the world than I am," she said, at length. "What is your opinion; would you have any objection, if anything was to take place?"

"I? Oh no, as long as Roger is happy, I am contented, but Miss Erving's guardian, will he be satisfied? her fortune is large, she might aspire to making a much higher connexion. Roger has nothing but his profession to depend on, it would of course be a great advantage to him; not that such considerations would induce him to choose a rich wife. I know Roger better, he is well principled and generous, you may feel quite secure on that head, my dear Lucy."

"I know I may, and to tell the truth, I should like nothing better than to see my Maud become

Mrs. Macklaren, but we must not try to bring this about ; I cannot endure match-making, only we might let things take their natural course."

Miss Massing looked highly pleased at having delivered herself of this speech, and turned her eyes maternally towards the unconscious Maud, who was in the act of disentangling a star-fish from some matted seaweed ; there was a tall figure standing near her, but it was not Captain Macklaren, he stood at some distance likewise examining something very attentively.

"Would you be kind enough to help me to get rid of this seaweed?" exclaimed Maud, without looking round.

"With the greatest pleasure," said a voice close to her, which made her start and look up.

"Count Porskinski ! I did not know you were with us. I must beg your pardon, for I fancied I was addressing Captain Macklaren."

"You have never any cause to beg my pardon," said the Count, frowning slightly, as he glanced at the young man who had joined them on hearing her speak. "Can I not do as well as he ? I could be skilful in your service," he added, in his native tongue.

Maud gave him the seaweed smiling, and the Count turned a look of triumph on his adversary, who was quite unconscious of what was going on.

"What does Miss Erving want with this nasty lit-tle beast?" asked the Count.

"Oh, pray treat it with great respect, I am making a collection," said Maud, laughing heartily at his dislike to touching it.

"Donner ! but it does not smell very nice ; I might say it did stink."

"The poor thing is dead then," said Maud, looking closer at it.

"Oh, I should think it had been dead a very long time," suggested the Count.

"It is of no use as it is dead, they do not dry well, so we can throw it away."

"That will give me the greatest pleasure," said the Count, throwing the star-fish with all his force into the sea.

"You do not study natural history, I should imagine," said Maud, looking at him.

"How can you say that? I have studied the botany all my life, and see, but just now, I did dirty my fingers for you in the cause of the great science."

"What do you call the great science?" asked Maud.

"Ah, you make fun of me; I speak your English all the wrong way, and you laugh."

"Not at all; I only wished to know which of the sciences you honoured with the prefix of great."

The Count smiled blandly, and said in his most polite tone—

"Any science you take an interest in, I should call great."

"Miss Briggs has luncheon at one o'clock," interposed Miss Massing; "we are a long way from home, suppose we turn back."

"Our first essay has not been very successful," said Maud, approaching Captain Macklaren. "We must hope for better luck another time."

Count Porskinski gazed at them from beneath his overhanging eyebrows, and ejaculated inwardly, as he pulled his moustache till it reached an infinitesimal point—

“Another time! they will meet often, I must prevent this—Count Porskinski must not be undone by a paltry Englishman, a little, ugly fellow, the scum of the earth. Miss Erving is a patriot, she admires Poland, feels for us poor exiles; she shall take still greater interest in that ill-used land, and shall call it country, home, shall open her arms, and clasp her hands in prayer for it, whilst I, Count Porskinski, look on and call her wife.”

“Who is that foreigner?” asked Captain Macklaren, in a whisper to Maud. “Is he your German master?”

“Oh no, he is staying at the Boarding House, and is a political refugee.”

“Indeed! may I presume to offer you a little advice?”

“Certainly,” said Maud, carelessly.

“Beware of foreign adventurers.”

“Thank you, I am not afraid of them,” rejoined Maud, somewhat coldly.

CHAPTER VII.

THE TEA-PARTY.

LYDIA CARPENTER was one of those active minded people so rarely met with in the world, who do everything well, and think no useful employment beneath them. Her parents were poor and had been unable to give her any advantages in education; she had, however, surmounted every difficulty and by dint of perseverance and application had made herself as accomplished as most young ladies of her age; she played beautifully on the piano, sang well, and was a good linguist. Mrs. Carpenter's health was delicate, and her daughter had frequently the whole management of the house, she was an excellent cook if necessity required, made all her own dresses, and might often be found trimming a bonnet; besides all these domestic duties Lydia Carpenter was very active in the parish, she had a district under Mr. Montague, attended the schools constantly, and never missed being at early morning prayers in the church. She was always cheerful, always good humoured, no one ever found her put out, or sitting with her hands before her wasting the precious moments God had given her, and this indeed was the talisman by

which she worked such wonders and did more than two or three ordinary persons who are content to idle away their time. Lydia had always some book in her pocket to read at spare moments, she was up with the lark, did everything by clock-work, and retired late to rest.

It is true there was no poetry, no imagination in her character, persons who live by prescribed rules never have. This showed itself in all she did; her touch on the piano was cold and rigid, like one who has practised well and gained brilliant execution, but not the soul of music, which thrills to the heart of all who hear it, and makes every pulse of the performer throb as they express their own feelings in the heart-stirring notes of the melody. No, Lydia Carpenter sat down to the piano like a school girl, went through the difficulties admirably, and had she been under Mademoiselle Lafoure would have most assuredly gained the highest prize for industry and perseverance, and well would she have deserved it. She was invaluable in the sphere of action in which she moved, an excellent daughter and housewife, an active parishioner, always willing to do what she could, and never presuming beyond that which was entrusted to her. Would there were more Lydia Carpenters in the world! but there are few who possess sufficient energy of mind to be perfect in so many branches of usefulness; it is but energy they want: Lydia was not talented and had many household cares upon her young mind.

Such, then, was the person who entered Miss Massing's little sitting-room to take off her shawl and bonnet on the night of the tea-party at the Boarding House.

"I am so glad to see you, Lydia," said that lady,

advancing to meet her guest. "I have been longing to introduce you to my niece—you will be good friends I am sure. Maud, dear, here is Lydia Carpenter," and the two young ladies were introduced to each other. "You have brought your music, I hope?" said Miss Massing; then perceiving a portfolio in her hand, she added, "that is right; we shall want something to enliven us, and keep the peace, for Mr. Pipkin is coming."

"Indeed!" said Lydia, "I hope he will not lecture us all the evening. Is his poor little wife coming with him?"

"No; Miss Briggs invited her, but he replied that she would be occupied in household duties, and consequently must decline the obliging invitation. She never goes into society, I believe."

"Poor woman, he prefers having all the attention paid to himself; if she appeared, she would necessarily have a share of it, so he keeps her in the background out of sight."

"Hush!" interposed Miss Massing, putting her hand on the young lady's mouth, "we must speak respectfully, for there he is—I hear a ring at the bell; let us go down stairs, that we may be in the drawing-room when he makes his appearance."

As the trio entered the sitting-room there was a general movement, and many degrees of stiff little bows were exchanged.

"Maud, my dear, I must introduce you to Mr. Carpenter," said Miss Massing as she presented her niece to a very dandy young gentleman, whose small head and thin, expressionless features denoted him to be one of those mild young men who are not above frequenting tea parties or any small entertainments at watering-places, and indeed he called everything "great fun." He had left college

and had arrived at the age of painful doubt as to what next is to be done: he did not like going into the church, he said, "it was so slow;" and as for the law, the fusty old books he would have to peruse made him sneeze and cough—he could not possibly enter such a profession. His tender parents did not wish to force his inclinations, they said; they would give him time to consider; and as Mr. Arthur Carpenter's greatest predilection was for doing nothing, he had his wish, and alas! never thought about the future. People sighed when they looked at him, and wished that he and his sister could change places, but as this was impossible their good wishes did not avail.

Count Porkinski no sooner perceived Maud enter the apartment, than he quitted Miss Bridges, who had been doing her best to interest him with her lively conversation, and placed himself on a vacant chair beside her, thereby showing his bad taste, as the disappointed Miss Bridges thought, in preferring beauty to wisdom, for strange to say she did not labour under the happy delusion of most plain people, and never for a moment considered herself pretty, but, on the contrary, believed in the revelations of her looking-glass. "Poor deluded man!" thought she, as she turned to her friend, Mrs. Blount, "if he places his affections on that girl, he will only meet with bitter disappointment; she will trifle with him and then cast him off; whereas I—how differently would I treat him."

Just then the door opened, and Mr. Pipkin was announced. Before attempting to draw either his personal appearance or his character, let us assure our readers that we do not allude to a class but simply to an individual, and as we sincerely hope, to a solitary case. Mr. Pipkin was very

particular about his dress, his hair was never ruffled, his coat and shirt never creased, and yet it would appear that he was always fearful lest inadvertently some derangement had taken place, for he never passed a mirror without casting a side glance at himself, and the result of such inspection was always a hasty movement of the hand either over his shining hair or down his shirt. He was tall and of a good figure, though rather too portly; he always threw his head back as he walked, and this gave him a conceited air rather repelling than attractive. Mr. Pipkin's admirers however could see no fault in him, and his little weaknesses were regarded as fresh proofs of goodness.

His entrance caused a great deal of excitement amongst the company. Miss Briggs bustled up to him, pulled the most comfortable chair out of a corner and placed it near Mrs. Blount, his devoted admirer, making a sign at the same time that it was for him. Bowing stiffly, Mr. Pipkin advanced towards it with a pompous step.

"*Adolescentem verecundum esse decet*," said he, blandly; "nevertheless as you offer me so exalted a position I will not refuse." He considered himself quite young, although to outward appearance he must have been some years past thirty. After seating himself leisurely in the arm chair, he raised his eyes slowly to Mrs. Blount and said, as he clasped his hands—

"Beautiful weather! have you been taking advantage of it, Mrs. Blount? I have not had the pleasure of seeing you for some time."

Mrs. Blount pleaded her nervous headaches as the cause of her not going out.

"Ah, the Indian climate ruins European constitutions; the country is, I have heard, very

beautiful, but we must not be led away by outward show; there is generally speaking something beneath the surface, it is to that we must look, Mrs. Blount."

"Very true," said she, sighing, "all beautiful things on this earth are pernicious."

"I preached on that subject last Sunday; my sermon was, I fear, too short and not quite sufficiently impressive, but—you understand Latin, I presume?"

"A little," said Mrs. Blount, modestly.

"I was going to say, *Veritatis simplex oratio est.*"

"Every word you uttered is engraven on my mind. Your sermon was full of religious pathos and Bible truths."

"I am glad you approved of it," said Mr. Pipkin—he was very well accustomed to such praise.

"How clever he is," whispered Miss Bridges to her friend; "he is such a good classical scholar."

"Your numerous duties must fatigue you greatly," said Mrs. Blount, addressing him in tones of evident sympathy. "I wish much that you had a curate; your neighbour, Mr. Montague, has one, and he has not nearly as much on his hands." She raised her voice as she pronounced these last words in the hope that Lydia Carpenter might overhear them.

Mr. Pipkin did not immediately reply, but casting his eyes up languidly to the ceiling he said, in a subdued tone, "Labour is sweet, and though we may not see the fruits now, we shall do so some day."

"Does not the parson look like that delectable bird, 'a dying duck?'" said Mr. Carpenter to Maud, who was seated between him and the Count.

"Who is that gentleman?" asked the foreigner. "Is he a little wrong up there?" and he touched his forehead.

Maud could not suppress a smile, but replied that he was a clergyman residing at Brimelsea, whereupon the Count naturally demanded if all English clergymen were like him.

“No, certainly not,” said Maud. “Mr. Pipkin, my aunt tells me, is very peculiar; but you must not ask me many questions, I am as great a stranger in Brimelsea as you are yourself.”

Lydia Carpenter at Miss Massing’s request went to the piano, and in spite of Mr. Pipkin’s desire that they might have a psalm tune she sat down and played a difficult piece of Thalberg’s with great effect. Maud listened attentively, notwithstanding Mr. Arthur Carpenter’s repeated attempts to draw her into conversation.

“Thank you, that is most beautiful,” said she, at the conclusion of the performance; “how I envy you your talent!”

“I dare say you have far more than I. Will you not give us a song?” Lydia rose and approached her.

“Do favour us,” said Mr. Carpenter, yawning. “Lid plays so abominably, we want something to put us in love with music again.”

Count Porskinski added his persuasions to the others, and ashamed to resist longer, Maud complied with their request, and seating herself at the piano, sang an impassioned German song of which home was the theme. Count Porskinski stood beside her entranced, and when she had finished and her eyes met his, she saw him brush a tear hastily from his cheek; the next instant he had seized her hand, and before she could prevent him had borne it to his lips.

“Oh!” ejaculated Miss Bridges, indignantly, from the farther extremity of the room. “What

a forward girl ! did you ever see anything like that, Mrs. Blount ? Depend upon it she has been singing a love song to him ; I am really quite shocked."

" Pardon me, Mademoiselle Erving," said the Count, " but you cannot tell how that song of home has moved me, it was like an echo from my native land. Would you sing it once more ?"

" Do you really wish it ?" asked Maud, hesitatingly.

" Yes, I do indeed, if it is not asking too great a favour," and he fixed his dark eyes on her beseechingly, so that she was forced to turn to the piano and begin again. There are, perhaps, few things more difficult than to sing a plaintive air, when you know that it affects one of your hearers very deeply. Maud felt this, and her voice trembled as she sang, though she went bravely to the end. Great applause greeted her as she rose, and Mr. Pipkin actually vouchsafed to say she had a fine voice, and it was a pity she did not exercise it in a better cause.

" You would sing psalm tunes very well did you but turn your talent to its right account. Young ladies are too fond of the world's music now-a-days."

" I often sing sacred music," said Maud. " I used to sing Mozart's masses in chorus, when I was at school."

Mr. Pipkin turned from her—to sing a mass was a heinous crime in his eyes. Mrs. Blount imitated his expression, and looked shocked.

" Tea is quite ready," interposed the peace-keeping Miss Briggs. " We will go down stairs, if you are willing, Mr. Pipkin."

He rose, and drawing himself up pompously, he said, " I am quite agreeable, Miss Briggs."

“ Anything but agreeable, in the right meaning of the word,” whispered Lydia Carpenter to Miss Massing, as they followed the rest of the party down stairs into the dining-room, where a bountiful display of cakes and fancy bread met their view.

“ This is what we call a muffin turn out,” said Mr. Carpenter, in an under tone to Maud. “ You will see that the parson knows how to do ample justice to the cakes ; I bet you sixpence he will take one of each kind—mind you watch him, and see if I am not right.” Saying this, he was on the point of seating himself next her, when Count Porskinski, by a skilful and yet polite movement, slipped into the vacant chair.

“ Are you an admirer of our national songs in general ?” asked the Count, in German, addressing Maud.

“ Yes, I admire them very much, particularly when they speak of freedom, and bewail Poland’s sad fate,” replied she.

“ I am rejoiced to hear you say that ; would that all our nation were stirred with the enthusiasm that inspires you.”

“ Are you not all patriotic ?” asked Maud, in some surprise.

“ Alas ! not in the true sense of the word ; the greater number are content to endure slavery, for the sake of peace ; they dread the consequences of war ; fathers are not sufficiently patriotic to offer up their children as sacrifices to freedom ; wives cling around their husbands, and hold them back. It was not so once ; let us hope that things will change again, and that Poland will one day ring with the cries of freedom ; that women even will arm themselves against the common tyrant ; our

banner wave where it used in days of yore, and Poland be free once more."

"And can you do nothing towards attaining this end?" asked Maud, eagerly.

"How can I? I am exiled, proscribed, driven from shore to shore. Were I to write to my friends, I should but throw suspicion on them, and their fate would be no better than mine."

"Could you not disguise yourself, and return to your home; go from house to house, find out the sentiments of the people, and inflame their drooping spirits with hopes of victory and freedom?"

Count Porskinski smiled. "You do not know the danger of such an act."

"I can imagine it, but surely death in the cause of your country would be sweet."

"Yes, in its cause, fighting at the head of brave men; but that would not be my fate; I shudder to think what a life imprisonment would be—no hope of escape; worn down by want of food and disease, till life itself should prove a burden, and the wasted hands should clasp in prayer, that death's cold touch might wither the last vital spark, and set the spirit free."

"Very dreadful; but you must not forget, the greater the sufferings in a good cause, so much the greater would be the glory."

"My fate, like thousands of others, would be unknown, save perhaps to some spider who came to cheer me in my noisome dungeon, and into whose unconscious ear I might pour out my tale of woe."

"Do you mean to say there are thousands who are suffering at this present moment like that unfortunate Silvio Pellico, who wrote his own touching story so beautifully?"

Count Porskinski nodded his head mournfully. "Heaven only knows how many miserable human beings lie buried in their living tombs—whose crime is love of liberty, and hatred of all tyrants."

"Their cause will one day be known," said Maud, thoughtfully. "God does not permit the innocent to suffer unavenged."

Count Porskinski smiled bitterly, as he said—"Yet many have passed from the earth unheeded; have changed their damp dungeon for the cold ground."

"Their cause is heard in heaven; retribution will come, though the time may yet be distant."

"I am glad you think so, but there are times when I despair of it—and even regret that I ever stirred a hand in the cause of freedom."

Maud looked at him somewhat surprised, and he continued hurriedly—"These thoughts oppress me when I long for quiet, and when I sigh for my native land, but they disperse like the rain clouds, and the sun of my life shines on me again, though often but faintly. You do not know what unhappiness is," said he, looking into her clear, calm eyes—"may you never know it; may you never feel that longing after something you cannot get; that unsatisfied yearning of the heart which weighs down the spirit, and bedims the eyes with tears. I cannot define the feeling, but the sea when it dashes gently against the shore, and the summer breeze tells you what it is."

"Maud," exclaimed Miss Massing, "would you pass the muffin? Mr. Carpenter has asked you for it three times."

"A thousand pardons," exclaimed Count Porskinski, "I was quite forgetful, quite in the clouds."

That evening, when all had retired to rest, Maud was looking out of her window at the moon, whose clear reflection sparkled in the shining water, and she fancied she saw a tall figure leave the house, and wending its way to the beach, stretch itself on the sand before the Boarding House. She looked steadily at it, yes, it was a man, and—very like Count Porskinski.

“What a strange being he is!” thought she; “there is something very noble in his love for his country, and yet he puzzles me. I half doubt his patriotism at times, and fancy he puts it on to..... well, I do not know why, I should hardly think he would take the trouble to feign just to please me, and yet he is very odd, he says such sentimental things, he cannot surely imagine himself in..... no, what nonsense, I must be very conceited to think any one in love with me, till I have certain proof that they are. Still I had better take care, or Miss Bridges will call me a flirt, and—‘Beware of foreign adventurers’—who was it that said that? Oh, I remember, it was Captain Macklaren. I wonder if he will be successful to-morrow, when he is out dredging; if he is, we are to spend the evening with them, that I may get a lesson. Lady Macklaren is a fine old lady; she must have been very handsome; her son is very like her.” And Maud turned away from the window.

What a charm there is in moonlight! Its soft rays seem to calm the throbbing heart, and lull the senses to rest. It beautifies nature, and fills the earth with a spirit light, full of mystery and dreams; how much more too is this soothing influence increased, when the soft dash of the waves on the shore and the melancholy cry of the sea-gull is all that disturbs the silence around! Truly

nature whispers deep, untold consolations at such times ; and if we read its words aright, they lead us upwards through the poetry of religion, to the All-powerful Being who reigns on high.

Count Porskinski was not a wicked man ; he had no set form of religion it is true, but there was an undefined reverence for the supreme Being in his heart, although want of education, and too great contact with the world, had led him astray. His principles and views on all religious topics were dictated by his own heart, the result of much thought and investigation, but there was no stability in them ; he was as changeable as the tossing sea, which now rolled before him, and yet he wished to do right. You who censure the faults of others, pause—you know not the struggles, the disappointments and vexations that have led that heart astray ; look kindly on them, and praise God that you have been preserved from like temptations, under which you too might have fallen, had they been placed in your way.

CHAPTER VIII.

TAKE CARE.

“MAUD, my dear.....oh!” ejaculated Miss Massing one morning, as she threw open the door of her niece’s room, and nearly fell over a large basin of water placed on the floor.

“Take care, Aunt Lucy, it is full of crabs. I caught the dearest little hermit the other day, and it has completely hid itself, I cannot see it anywhere.”

“You really should not make your room so untidy, my dear; only think, if I had come in hastily I might have hurt myself seriously by falling over that basin.”

“But you are a good, steady old aunt, and not a giddy young thing like myself, so there is no fear. But do you know, I nearly sent poor Laurette into hysterics this morning; when she came to call me, she did not see the marvellous contents of my wash-handbasin, and was on the point of lifting it up, when she exclaimed—‘Oh, the little frightful monsters that Mademoiselle keeps in her apartment!’”

“Well you are very strange,” said the good-natured old lady, arranging her little brown curls

before the looking glass. "But I have come to carry you away from your pets; Lydia Carpenter is here, and wants to show you the Schools; she is going there directly, as she has some business with the mistress. Will you consent to go with her—it will be a nice change for you?"

"I shall be delighted to go, if she will promise to walk with me afterwards."

"I have no doubt she will, so put on your bonnet, and pray take this large basin of crabs away, it is very unsafe where it is."

"I will be with you in one moment," cried Maud; and she was faithful to her promise, for a quarter of an hour had scarcely elapsed before she and her new friend Lydia Carpenter were on their way to the National Schools.

"How did you enjoy our tea-party?" asked Maud, with a smile.

"Very much, for it has given me a new friend, and I sadly want companions here."

"Do you know, Miss Bridges has begun a pair of gentleman's slippers; I cannot imagine who they are for, as she says she has no near relations."

"Oh," said Lydia, "then I think I can tell you."

"Do you think they can be for Mr. Pipkin?"

"That is possible, but from what I saw, I should say Miss Bridges has some designs on the Count's heart; she is very jealous of you, he pays you so much attention."

Maud laughed, but she blushed deeply in spite of herself, and said—"He is unlike most of his nation, and enjoys speaking his native language, although he understands English so well. I am the only one in the house who can speak German, so he pins himself on me."

“That may be, but any one might discover that he has a great admiration for you.”

“Nonsense, Lydia.”

“No, it is not nonsense; for why should he gaze at you whilst you are talking? I watched him very narrowly, and saw plainly that he could scarcely keep his eyes off you; this must be admiration.”

Maud blushed again as she said—“If we are to be great friends you must not flatter me, I cannot endure it; will you promise me this, Lydia?”

“I did not mean to flatter you, I only thought you might like to know the opinion of a third person on the subject.”

“Thank you; I find every one thinks it necessary to warn me against him, but I assure you, I have not found him dangerous in any way as yet—he does not bite or even bark. I feel quite sorry for the poor man.”

Lydia smiled. “Take care you do not make him fall in love with you.”

“I have no wish to do that, I am not a coquette,” said Maud, somewhat displeased.

“No, I am sure you are not, I can see that by your face; but we are apt to fall innocently into error—a word, a look is often brought against an unfortunate woman, whereas men may do what they like, and say what they like, without fear of censure.”

“I am afraid I do not care much what people say, for I believe if they are inclined to think ill of you, they are sure to find some weak point to make the most of.”

“You have a bad idea of human nature,” said Lydia, thoughtfully; “but you must not forget how easily we are led to find faults in others, without being intentionally malicious.”

“That is true, and as it is impossible to help being different to different people, there must necessarily be misunderstandings, and false judgments.”

“If it were not for misunderstandings, I believe we should like everybody.”

“How charitable you are; but I cannot agree with you, Lydia, I could not like deceitful people, there is something so mean about them.”

“We should consider a long time before we pronounced a person to be deceitful; we do not know the impulse that directs their actions or their motives—they may often be pure though appearances are against them.”

“What a capital school-mistress you would make! Do you teach in the Sunday School?”

“Yes, I have the management of it under Mr. Montague. I am sure you would like him, he is such a good person.”

“And does not pick holes in his neighbour’s coat?”

“No, not even in Mr. Pipkin’s.”

“That is very amiable,” said Maud laughing. “I do not think I could help quizzing him.”

“He is a very excellent man in his way, and does a great deal of good amongst the poor, but, as you must have seen the other evening, the ladies spoil him, and his greatest foible is conceit.” As she said this, she stopped before a wooden gate leading through a yard, to a red brick building. Passing the school-room door, they proceeded to a detached house on the left hand side; here they halted and Lydia knocked, saying as she did so, “This is the school-mistress’s house. I will ask her to do the honours of the rest of the building herself; she is a very nice woman, I see a great deal of her.”

The words were hardly out of her mouth, when the door opened and an elegant person stood before them. Miss Smith was one of those unfortunate people who, born of poor parents, have by education risen above their situation, and are consequently isolated in society. She was too proud to mix with her equals in rank, and yet unable on account of her profession to associate with those above her. Lydia Carpenter took great interest in the schools, and as much of her time was spent there, she was naturally brought into contact with the mistress. Struck with her ladylike demeanour and modesty, Lydia cultivated her acquaintance, and discovering how solitary her life was, she took compassion on her, offered to walk with her, and would even spend an hour in the evening with her sometimes, when she could be spared from home. Miss Smith was of a prepossessing appearance, and though not actually handsome, had a sweet expression of countenance, and an elegant figure. It was not therefore surprising that Lydia Carpenter's brother should be attracted by his sister's friend, that he should frequently join them in their walks, or offer goodnaturedly to take messages to the school, when Lydia was unable to go herself. But what is hardly to be believed is, that the sister should be blind to what was going on, should delude herself with the idea that all was quite right, and trust thus implicitly in her friend's good sense and tact; yet so it was, and up to the present period, she had not the smallest idea that her brother was clandestinely engaged to the woman she treated with her confidence, and out of kindness, called her friend.

“ Oh, I am so glad to see you, Miss Carpenter.

You have not been here for these two days, and I was afraid you might be ill."

They shook hands. "I have brought my friend, Miss Erving, to see the schools; could you show us them this morning?"

"With the greatest pleasure, but I am sorry to say you will not see them at their best, for all the children have gone home, as it is a half-holiday. Will you step in and take a seat, whilst I slip on my bonnet? I will not detain you a minute." They complied, and found themselves in a neatly-furnished room, with pictures hanging on the walls, and a large book-case full of books of all kinds; on the table stood a vase of flowers, and a few books of prints around it. Maud opened one and read on the title page—"Alice Smith the gift of A. C." She shut it without comment; the binding was the handsomest part of the work, and there was nothing inside to attract notice—the initials A. C. might belong to any one, Lydia did not even look up on hearing them pronounced.

"Is she not a very superior person?" said she to Maud, as Miss Smith quitted the apartment, "so lady-like and refined, poor thing it is a great disadvantage to her, as she has no friends. Would you very much object if I were to invite her to walk with us on the beach? It would be a real charity, as it must be so dull for her always to be alone."

Maud offered no objection, and Miss Smith was accordingly asked to join them, which she readily accepted, and when they had seen the school-rooms, and Lydia had arranged the business she came to transact, the three started for their walk by the sea-shore.

“My friend Miss Erving is a great naturalist,” said Lydia, smiling.

“Indeed, in what way?” asked Miss Smith.

“In no way particularly,” replied Maud; “I am a dabbler, fond of every branch, and learned in none.”

“She is at present studying seaweeds,” continued Lydia.

“No, there you mistake, I am hard at work collecting zoophytes; it is an excessively interesting study, and I have found an instructor in Captain Macklaren—I should not wonder if we were to meet him to-day. Will you help me to poke amongst the rocks, Lydia?”

“With pleasure, only I fear I shall not know what is a treasure and what is not. Where do you intend searching?”

“Along the north cliff in that bay closed in by rocks; we shall have an hour and a half before the tide comes up.”

“Not unless we make haste,” said Lydia, quickening her pace. There was a refreshing breeze from the sea, which prevented the sun from being too hot, and the light passing clouds threw their shadows partially on the sea, dyeing it with ever-varying colours. A better morning could not have been chosen for a ramble, and the bay which Maud had indicated was soon reached. As they scrambled over the rocks, intent upon finding the natural curiosities of which they were in search, they did not perceive that their steps were followed, till suddenly a tall figure stood beside them.

“Count Porskinski!” ejaculated Maud, blushing as she caught Lydia’s eye resting on her.

“Yes, I saw you from a distance, and have made the greatest possible haste to come and help

you to find the little animals of which you are so fond."

"You are very kind," said Maud, somewhat embarrassed, she knew not why.

"Oh, it is the greatest pleasure I have in life. I should indeed be a happy man, might I be allowed to dedicate each hour of my existence to your service, never to lose sight of you, and to be your humble slave."

Maud felt really distressed, and turning from him hurried on. This speech was, however, lost on Lydia, as she was not sufficiently acquainted with the German language to understand it, when it was quickly spoken.

"I left your aunt, Miss Massing, about to pay a visit to your friend and relative, Lady Macklaren," continued Count Porskinski, rejoining Maud. "She, it was, who told me where I might have the felicity of finding you, and believe me I did not rest till I gained your side. I am miserable when away from you, I live only beneath the sunshine of your smiles."

"Count Porskinski, I am not accustomed to hear such language, it displeases me," said Maud, rather proudly; "you have not hitherto addressed me in this manner; I must beg you either to retire, or....."

"Cruel, you must not send me away; let me carry that basket, I will walk behind you with it, will watch you at a distance, but do not send me away." Maud smiled in spite of herself; there was something so ridiculous in the tone and manner of her admirer. She gave him the basket, and bowing low he retired to a little distance, and walked on with a disconsolate air.

“What has happened?” asked Lydia, in a whisper.

“Nothing, only nonsense,” was the reply; and Maud strove to hide her burning cheeks by stooping over a pool of seawater left in the rocks. The Count was by her side in an instant, holding out the basket to receive the imaginary treasure that was to be found in the hard, cleanly-scooped basin which held the water. “There is nothing here,” said Maud, rising; and with a bow the Count retired to a distance again.

“This is too ridiculous,” said Maud to Lydia, who was not a little diverted by what was going on.

“It seems so,” said she, “though I do not understand the cause.”

“Neither do I, but I must put a stop to this exhibition in some way.”

“Take care!” said Lydia, warningly, as she turned away to talk to Miss Smith.

“Count Porskinski!” exclaimed Maud, despairingly; he was by her side. “What do you mean by this extraordinary behaviour?”

“Extraordinary!” said he. “Not at all; I do but evince my devotion to you.”

“But I wish you would not,” exclaimed Maud, almost childishly. “It is so ridiculous, my friends are astonished at you.”

“That is a pity; but if you will tell me what you would like me to do, I will do it immediately, were you even so cruel as to tell me to go and drown myself in the sea!”

“I do not ask anything so unreasonable, I only express a wish that you will treat me as you have done up to the present time, and forget what has just passed.”

"To forget anything in connexion with you will indeed be a difficult task, but as you command it, I will obey so far as my frail nature will admit." Thus saying the Count bowed profoundly.

"Let us climb up that projecting rock," said Maud, turning hurriedly to Lydia; "it is not above high water mark; the sea may have left something for our inspection, who knows."

She had scarcely uttered the words, when her strange admirer darting up the rock in question, stood at the top, and waving his hat one moment in the air, began searching diligently amongst the matted and entangled seaweed. "I advise you to come up, there are very curious things to be found here, I am sure," said he, without raising his head; and the rest of the party immediately followed on his steps, though not so quickly. The Count was right, and Maud had the satisfaction of finding some specimens entirely new to her; indeed she soon became so absorbed in the pursuit that she forgot all that had passed, and time flew on without any of them heeding its progress.

"Have you heard that there is to be a ball at the Assembly Rooms soon?" asked Lydia, addressing Maud.

"My aunt was saying something about it," she replied.

"Do you intend going to it?"

"Eh, I do not know; perhaps I shall not be considered strong enough yet to undergo the fatigues of dancing," said Maud, smiling.

"You do not look ill: all Brimelsea will be there—you ought to be introduced to our fashionable society."

"Are you then going?" asked Maud.

"No, not I, you must not number me amongst

the fashionable ; I never go to balls—not that I disapprove of them, or dislike dancing, but we are poor and cannot afford the expense. Arthur goes.”

Miss Smith had suddenly found a star-fish.

“ I am getting tired,” said Maud, resting herself against a piece of rock. “ Is it not time to be wending our way back—we have come a long distance—what is the tide doing ?”

“ It is rising,” said Lydia, looking towards the sea.

“ And very rapidly,” rejoined Miss Smith.

The seacoast of Brimelsea beyond the Peak Rocks, as they are called, is very treacherous ; it consists of several bays running up into the land, and enclosed by high, almost perpendicular cliffs, and sharp projecting rocks jutting out into the sea. At low water these bays are a favourite resort for those who love climbing, and when our party first arrived, there were several groups of people amusing themselves in hunting for agates, jet, shells, &c. ; one by one, however, these disappeared, and yet our adventurers wandered on ; nor was it till they had reached the farther extremity of the second bay that Maud thought of returning.

“ We have plenty of time, I am sure,” said Lydia, “ for look, the tide has not reached the Peak yet.”

“ It had not need have done that,” rejoined Miss Smith, somewhat anxiously, “ for you know how rapidly it rushes into Brimelsea Bay when once the waves dash against the Peak.”

“ You are right—we must quicken our steps,” said Lydia ; “ it would not be pleasant to be caught, I never have been yet.”

“ Is it dangerous ? Should we be drowned ?”

asked Maud, looking involuntarily towards the steep cliffs that enclosed them on all sides.

“Mein Gott! who is talking of drowning?” demanded the Count, approaching Maud.

Lydia could not suppress a smile.

“No, there is not the least danger; it is not a spring tide, and if it were, we could easily climb high above the waves. The worst that can befall us will be to wait here till the tide runs out again.”

“Six hours!” said Maud, sighing, and the whole party fixed their eyes on the distant point which, once gained, would secure their safe return; soon, however, the rocks intervened, and shut out their view. “It was very foolish of us to venture so far, I quite forgot how we were to get back,” said Maud, uneasily.

“Do not be the least alarmed,” urged Lydia; then turning to the Count, she added, “why did you not watch the tide for us?”

“I! oh, really, Mademoiselle Carpenter, you cannot suppose I should understand your English sea.”

“Why not? it has the same propensities as any other.”

“But then I was engaged in thinking; my body was here, but my heart was in the clouds.”

“How very uncomfortable,” murmured Lydia, in an under tone. “Has it come down yet?” added she aloud.

“I heard that there was danger, and I jumped. But, ladies, be comforted, I will die to save you, will drown—what can I do more?”

“That is more than either we expect or wish for,” said Lydia, laughing. Maud had got somewhat in advance, and was the first to reach the top of the little promontory of rocks that led to the

first bay, and her exclamation of "Oh!" made the others hasten to her side.

"What is the matter?"

"Look," she said, pointing to the Peak, over which the waves were sportively dashing.

"If we walk very fast, we may yet be in time," said Lydia, darting forwards, and like hunted hares they ran with full speed towards the distant point, but their efforts were in vain, and when at length they reached the barrier, and stood upon the highest rock, they had the disappointment of seeing the waves roll beneath them, and dash majestically on the shore beyond.

They stood still, silent and breathless, till at length Lydia said—"We must not remain here, we must retire to the farther end of the bay, and make ourselves as comfortable as circumstances will admit, for we shall not be released before night."

"Is there no one on the shore to whom we might make signs?" asked Miss Smith, disconsolately.

"None that would be able to see us, at this distance," said Maud.

"But the sailors always have their telescopes by them; we might sacrifice a handkerchief, and tie it to one of these rocks, perhaps some kind persons will turn their eyes in this direction."

The plan was agreed to, and Count Porskinski's red pocket handkerchief, that looked as if it had had a close acquaintance with snuff, was made into a flag of distress, and the whole party left the rock, which was now fast becoming an island.

"Something tells me we shall not have to remain here long, but we had better choose a comfortable abode amongst the rocks, for I suppose the sea reaches up to them," remarked Maud.

“ In spring tides it does, but not now ; we have nothing to fear from the waves, I hope the clouds will be equally kind, in not attempting to wet us ;” and they all turned their eyes towards a thick gathering mass above the horizon.

“ It does not look very promising, but we will not despair till the first drops begin to fall.” Thus saying, Maud drew her thin summer shawl more closely round her, and began to ascend the cliff in search of a resting-place. “ Here is my abode for the next six hours,” she said at length, seating herself on a round stone, “ for just below me is a pool of seawater for my poor pets in the basket.”

“ A what ?” asked Lydia.

“ A pool of seawater,” repeated Maud. “ What makes you look so scared ?”

“ That shows us the waves rose as high as this last tide,” said Lydia.

“ So it does ; we must go higher still.” Maud found this task a harder one than she anticipated, for above the point where the sea had worn the rocks, they rose in smooth almost perpendicular slabs, up to the top of the declivity that frowned over head. “ I hope they will miss us, and send some one to release us from our most uncomfortable prison,” said Maud, stopping to take breath, and turning round to look for the rest of the party. Lydia was struggling close beside her, Miss Smith stood on a projecting point, somewhat lower down, but Count Porskinski was not there. Maud no sooner remarked this, than she demanded where he was, and Lydia turned. “ Look, I see him, he never left the promontory, and there he is surrounded,” said Maud. “ What can he be doing ? foolish man !”

But Count Porskinski was not so foolish as she

thought, for there he stood waving his hat in one hand, and his red handkerchief in the other with all his might ; he had caught sight of some object in the distance, and was doing his best to attract notice. Maud called to him to apprise him of his perilous situation, but he only looked round for an instant, and then redoubled his exertions.

The breeze that had been so refreshing on their first starting had now strengthened, and came in fitful gusts, driving the clouds together, and raising the waves—proudly cresting they dashed against the rock on which the Pole stood resolute, and covered him with spray.

“Count Porskinski !” cried the three ladies at once. “Come, if you wait another moment you will be lost.” He did not even turn this time, but waving his hat high above his head, he shouted “Hurrah, bravo !”

“He is mad,” said Maud, rather alarmed ; “he will be drowned.” No, the Count knew how to preserve himself ; and after this burst of exultation he turned, stood upon the edge of the rock, waited till the wave should recede, then springing with all his might, he stood amid a shower of spray upon the sand.

“Heaven be praised !” ejaculated Lydia. “I was really frightened.”

“We are saved !” shouted the Count, making the best of his way towards them. “They come—I have seen the boat—it will be here directly.”

The sea rose higher and higher, the clouds thickened and swept across the sky, but still no rain fell. Our adventurers were very silent, they sat at no great distance from each other, but were all intent on looking for the expected boat ; it came not, however. Whether their deliverers had dis-

covered that the increasing bad weather would prevent the boat landing, or the Count had mistaken a fishing-boat for one sent to free them from prison, they could not say, and dared not think.

"We must get a little higher," said Lydia; "the wind drives the spray in our faces too much here, we shall be wet through."

"That will be the case anywhere," said Maud, gravely; "but we may try to better our situation, only I fear to slip now that the sea is below us."

Count Porskinski looked around him, and after a pause said, "I will go in search of a resting-place—wait here till I have found one."

"Thank you," said Maud, and looking up, she saw that his dark eyes rested on her searchingly, but only for a moment, and then he was gone, climbing like a mountaineer up the steep acclivity. They watched his course, and there was a spark of admiration burning in Maud's eye, as she saw the agility of his movements, now resting on the merest ledge, now springing to a surer resting-place, ever higher, higher, till it made them sick and dizzy to watch him. "Oh!" cried Maud. "What is he going to attempt—surely not to reach the summit?"

"I fear he is," said Lydia; "I shudder to think what may be his fate."

Higher and higher climbed the Count, never stopping to pause or take breath, shaping his course in a sloping direction; certain destruction below him, security on the dark summit above. It was a bold venture, but one look had sufficed to show the practised mountain huntsman that the attempt was practicable; disappointed of the boat, believing that death awaited them if they had to remain where they were, he resolved to make the attempt,

and he succeeded ; the point to which he bent his course came nearer and nearer, one step and he would be safe ; he paused, he seemed to balance himself on air, one more violent effort and he lay full-length on the stunted grass above.

“ Safe, safe ! ” cried the watchers from below ; Maud covered her face in her hands and wept ; anxiety and fear overcame her, and tears forced themselves down her cheeks. The tide in the meantime had risen higher, the waves dashed against the rock below them, and the spray darted into the air ; heavy drops of rain began to fall, and the horizon was hid in mist ; it was one of those sudden storms at sea that rise so unexpectedly, and often overtake the unwary wanderer.

“ We are not much to be envied, ” said Miss Smith, trying to shake the wet from her bonnet. “ I wonder how long we shall have to sit here ? ”

“ We may be very thankful if this rock does not prove to be our grave, ” said Maud, solemnly.

“ There is no danger if we do not slip, ” persisted Lydia.

“ I feel myself already benumbed by the wet, ” continued Maud in a despairing tone and looking up at the heights above, although the rain blinded her. “ That was a noble feat the Count performed, he may yet be the cause of our preservation. How anxious my poor aunt will be ! ”

There is nothing more depressing to the spirits than being wet through, and the forlorn occupants of this barren rock felt the dejection consequent on it fast creeping over them. Lydia tried in vain to inspire her companions with a courage she did not feel herself, and after a few fruitless attempts to cheer them, she, too, fell into silence, and watched the foaming waves dreamily, as she

felt her wet clothes send a chill to her heart, and she trembled in every limb.

"How foolish we were !" moaned Maud. "Why did we not return sooner?"

"Think of your zoophytes," said Lydia, mustering all her powers to appear cheerful.

"Wretched things," cried Maud, "I have let basket and all drop into the sea; they will live happier there than in my keeping. I wish I could escape from this place as easily as they have done."

A shout from the cliff above them made each one start and look up, and there, looming amongst the mist, stood several figures upon the very edge of the precipice.

"We are saved !" said Maud, clasping her hands; then checking herself, she continued—"but how? They can never reach us here, and I could not climb as the Count did, my head would not stand it," and she looked up timidly. The figures had again disappeared. "They despair of saving us; they have gone that they may not see us die," and again she burst into tears.

"Courage, Maud; I am sure it is not your natural character to be soft-hearted; look up, one figure is still there," and Lydia pointed upwards. Maud raised her head, and there stood a tall figure looking down on them; Maud's heart said it was the Count, and she inwardly resolved never to doubt his bravery again. Presently the sound of voices reached them, a crowd of people appeared above, there was a movement amongst them; one ran this way, one that, then all was still, and a large object was seen slowly descending; what could it be? Down it came, swinging slightly, till at length it was near enough to perceive that it was a large basket, and that it contained a man. The

watchers from below were silent ; they even held their breath in their suspense, lest aught should happen to the frail, floating bark. It reached them—the man put out his hand and steadied himself against the rock, then slowly rising he put first one foot out and then the other, and stood before them.

“ Now, leddies, w’are ready,” said the sailor. “ Please to give me your hand ; steady does it ; who’ll go fust ? ”

“ Is there any danger ? ” asked Maud.

“ Lor bless ye, no, ma’am ; it is not the fust time we’ve haled folks up aloft like thus. Who’ll go fust ? ”

“ I will,” said Lydia, attempting to rise from the rock on which she had rested the whole time, but her limbs had grown stiff, and she could not move for some little while.

“ That’s it,” said the sailor, encouragingly ; “ steady does it—up with ye—gently—that’s the way, young leddy,” and, by dint of words and gentle force, he managed to seat his charge in the basket, then shouting to those above, he held it till it was out of his reach, and with a hearty “ All right,” he committed it to the air.

“ Oh, Lydia ! ” cried Maud, shutting her eyes.

“ Give me yer hand, ma’am ; it’s all right,” said the sailor, holding out his brawny fist to her. “ Ye might have climbed a little higher, the spray makes ye very weet here. Come with me.”

“ Let me stay here,” said Maud, fretfully. “ I shall soon leave it, and am wet through now.”

“ Will ye take my jacket ? Ye’ve not enough on to shade ye.”

“ Thank you, no ; but you are very kind, and

shall be rewarded for all this. Miss Smith, are you here?"

"I am just behind you," replied a weak voice. "How glad I shall be to get on firm land again."

"Don't ye call this firm land, ma'am? It's a good bit o' footing, and the waves there find it pretty firm."

The basket had reached the top of the cliff, and a shout greeted its arrival. Maud heard it, and a smile passed over her face.

"Here it comes agin," said the sailor. "It's your turn next, ma'am; be ready, but never fuss y'rsel'." Maud rose with difficulty, and taking the sailor's proffered hand, stood watching the basket as it descended, now bumping against the rock, now swinging round, but ever coming nearer and nearer till it reached the place where they were standing. She got in—she knew not how, obeyed the sailor's directions, and shut her eyes; a feeling of dizziness took possession of her; the noise of the waves rang in her ears; she felt as if she were being lowered into them; death seemed inevitable; then she heard voices, and one in particular struck on her ear, it was a kind, soft voice, and yet a manly one; there was a fascination in it, and, notwithstanding all her fear, she listened and felt the tones were familiar to her; they became plainer, the basket bumped against some object, she screamed, and, opening her eyes, perceived Captain Macklaren bending over her. "You are safe," he said.

"Thank God!" murmured Maud, and from that moment she lost all consciousness, till, jumping up with a start and opening her eyes wide, she discovered that she was in bed, and in her own room. "What does it mean?" cried she; "have I been asleep long?"

“Hush, Maud, my dear,” said her aunt, coming to the bedside. “Keep quite quiet, you have been ill.”

“Ill?” repeated she incredulously. “No, it was a hideous dream, that is all.”

“It was too true a dream, Maud, dear; but keep quiet and lie down.”

“I feel quite well, aunt Lucy, why should not I get up?”

“Because you have had a long fainting fit, and have undergone much fatigue.”

“Oh, yes—I know all about that; but it was only a foolish dream.”

“Lie down,” said Miss Massing, using slight force; “try and get to sleep.”

Maud put her head on the pillow and lay thinking for some time, then, stretching out her hand to her aunt, she said, “I am quite well now; let me hear how we were saved. I remember about the basket; was it not dreadful?”

“It was, indeed; but are you sure you are strong enough to speak?”

“Quite. I want to hear who saved us.”

“Well, if you promise to be quiet I will tell you all I know.” Maud promised, and Miss Massing, drawing her chair nearer the bed, continued—“After parting with Count Porskinski I went to call on Lady Macklaren, and remained with her a long time; then she and her son walked back here with me, expecting to find you as the tide was coming in, but, as you had not returned, they sat waiting in my room till the Captain, who had been watching the clouds, advised his mother to go home, which they did. From that time I began to be very uneasy, and sent to inquire about you, both at the schools and at Mrs. Carpenter’s house.

No one had seen anything of you since you left ; this frightened me very much, and, in spite of wind and rain, I walked back to Lady Macklaren's to ask advice and consolation ; she alone was there—her son had gone out, but she promised to send her servant after him with instructions to make every inquiry. I then went home, feeling very unhappy and anxious, knowing the direction you had taken. I went straight to my room, and there I remained till, to my horror, you were brought home insensible ; at first I thought you were drowned, but Captain Macklaren told me all, and he and the Count behaved most beautifully."

"But tell me how they found us," said Maud, raising herself on her arm.

"Lie down again, and then I will. Captain Macklaren was as uneasy as myself ; it seems he first tried to reach you in a boat, but the wind had made the sea so rough that he found such an attempt wholly impracticable, and they had to return. Having made inquiries about the rocks, and consulting with the sailors on the subject, he proceeded to the cliff above you with the necessary preparations ; on their way they met the Count, running breathlessly towards the town ; he told his story in a few words, and they all went together to deliver you from your perilous position. It is quite a romance. I never read anything more exciting in a novel."

"How are Lydia and Miss Smith?"

"Both quite well, they say ; but I have not, of course, seen them."

"Was Lady Macklaren very nervous about it?"

"She did not know the worst till her son returned, and, of course, he would make light of it to spare her."

“The Count behaved nobly,” said Maud. “Is he not any worse for his exertions?”

“I really do not know, but he seems quite well: he has been up and down stairs every five minutes to ask how you are, and it was all I could do to prevent his coming in to see you.”

Maud smiled, and said softly, “I am quite well, and should like to get up.”

“When you have had a cup of tea I will let you rise. Laurette will bring it up. I trust you will be none the worse for all this excitement, for do you know Lady Macklaren persuaded me to do a very foolish thing in your absence.”

“Indeed! What is it?”

“She made me take two tickets for the ball next week, and now there is every likelihood of their being thrown away.”

“I do not agree with you,” said Maud, her eyes brightening. “I shall be quite well and strong by that time, and you know how fond I am of dancing.”

“Well, we shall see.” The conversation was here interrupted by a knock at the door, and Miss Massing rose to admit Laurette with the tea.

CHAPTER IX.

TABLE-TALK.

THERE are times when the immensity of the universe oppresses us, when we feel that our swelling heart is as nothing, our very identity is lost amidst the vast multitude of striving human souls around us. Our head aches at the contemplation of the world, whose paths we are to tread comparatively unseen, and our soul longs for that eternity to which it is an heir. They were thoughts such as these that agitated Blanche's mind, as she sat alone in her bed-room at the Royal Hotel in Brimelsea; she had arrived that day with her father and his friend; Mademoiselle Lafoure was to follow them, as some private business had detained her in London. Lord Reynoldforde and the Marquis had gone out to inspect the yacht which was already in the harbour, and Blanche, being somewhat tired with her journey, had retired to her own apartment to rest till dinner; she was leaning out of the window, her rich hair hanging loosely about her shoulders, and pushed off her temples that the soft breeze might cool them. She was very pale, and there was an expression of inward suffering in her dreamy, half closed eyes; one hand supported her head and the

other dangled carelessly outside the window. There was a listlessness in her whole attitude which denoted an unnatural languor, and she sighed from time to time as if to relieve an overburdened heart.

“ Oh, that I was a seagull and could float upon the waves, could listen to their murmur, and learn the secrets of nature, when it speaks in those mournful tones. They are happy, they have no struggles, they do not try to win, and therefore cannot fail, whilst I..... Ah, how my head aches ! I have no one to cheer me, no one to whom I can entrust my burning thoughts. What will my future be ? I long to lift the veil that hides its mysteries from my eyes, and yet I dared not if I could, for misery may be there—a life of struggles, disappointments, woes. Heaven forbid ! my heart is weary now, it will break ere long. I hate the world—all are false. Would that my life could pass in a moment of blissful agony such as this, for I am at rest now, but must be gone to play the fool, and smile and fawn on a wretch because he is my father’s *friend*. I hate deceit, it is foreign to my nature ; yet I, too, must play my part in this false world ; some act well, others but badly, may I be among the first.” And with a scornful, bitter smile she rose, rang the bell for her maid, and began her toilette with a brow as unclouded as if no harassing thoughts oppressed it. Strange contradiction of nature, her heart yearned to tell its tale to some human ear, and yet she was too proud to show, even by outward signs, however slight, the tumult that reigned within. Foolish pride, thou hast too often been the cause of a broken heart ! human nature longs for sympathy in its sorrow, and thou thrustest it away and leavest the spirit to brood alone, to droop, and die.

When Blanche descended to the sitting-room, she found that Lord Reynoldforde and the Marquis had returned; they were standing in the window conversing merrily. She walked up to her father and took his hand; he kissed her forehead tenderly, and drawing her to him, said—

“We have a scheme for to-night’s amusement, Blanche; you will be delighted to hear it, I am sure. Whilst we were out looking about us an advertisement happened to attract the Marquis’s eye, and what do you think it was?”

“I cannot tell, I am sure,” said Blanche, looking up in his face.

“A ball to-night at the Assembly-rooms!”

“Well?”

“Well, we have taken three tickets and are going.”

“Impossible!” cried Blanche.

“Not at all; they say it is to be an excellent ball, and we are sure to meet old acquaintances—I have already recognized the names of some of the officers who are going, so now, Blanche, you have nothing to do but to order your maid to prepare your dress, and we will start at ten o’clock.”

“I am so weary, dear father,” said Blanche, pretending to yawn.

“Nonsense, child, you are not generally so when a ball is in prospect.”

“No, but I know nobody here, unless Maud happens to be there, yet I hardly think she will, as she came for her health, and balls are not usually the doctor’s prescription.”

“Might I ask the name of your friend?” asked the Marquis in French, and advancing towards Blanche. “I looked over the list of the expected guests, and I may possibly remember seeing your friend’s name.”

Blanche told it him, and a ray of pleasure shot over her face as he said—

“That name was amongst the first, and it was followed by a Miss Massing, and Lady and Captain Macklaren; perhaps they are also acquaintances of yours.”

“No, I know nothing of them, but Maud was my school friend—it will give me great pleasure to meet her.”

“You are willing to go now then, Blanche?” said her father.

“Yes, quite.”

“That is well, for I should not have liked to have gone without you.”

“Oh, I would not have allowed you to do that—but dinner is on the table, and the soup will be cold. I want to hear about the dear little ‘Firefly,’ and when you intend taking the first trip.”

“If to-morrow is as fine as to-day we will take a cruise somewhere; I have ordered the captain to be in readiness. Your cabin is beautifully fitted up, Blanche; I must introduce you to it to-morrow, at all events.”

“Poor Mademoiselle Lafoure shares it with me. does she not?”

“Yes, I hope she will not inconvenience you.”

“What do you think of the yacht?” asked Blanche, turning gaily to the Marquis, and saying inwardly, I know what his answer will be, he would say it was “*exquis*,” were it the most hideous vessel in the world.

“Oh, it is perfect, Mademoiselle; I congratulate you on having such a little gem, it creates quite a sensation in the harbour. I assure you the pier near it is crowded with people. You might give a splendid ball on the deck, the boards are so smooth

and broad, the rigging might be hung with coloured lamps ; it would be *charmant* !”

“ By heavens, so it would !” cried the delighted nobleman ; “ we will give one, Marquis, and you shall arrange everything. What a clever fellow you are ! Did not I tell you, Blanche, he was the very man to join our party.”

“ The very man to spend your money, poor papa,” thought Blanche ; but she said, smiling—
“ The Marquis is in his element in all these matters.”

“ All that requires taste I will submit to Made-moiselle’s care,” said the polite Frenchman.

Blanche bowed and assured him she did not understand such things ; then turning to her father she inquired where he would find guests sufficient for such an entertainment.

“ We shall have no difficulty in that, none at all. Wait till we have been to this ball, we shall then find out who are here, and send our invitations accordingly.”

“ You do not, I hope, intend to invite all the town to the Marquis’s entertainment ?” Blanche laid great stress on the last words.

“ Of course not, only those we know. But what shall we do for music, Montanvert ?” asked Lord Reynoldforde. “ We must have the best or the affair will be spoilt.”

“ I never was in an English watering place yet, that had not a German band ; we must engage that,” said the Marquis, earnestly, as if he was arranging a deep scheme, instead of planning a ball. “ We will raise a platform for them.”

“ What a pity, papa,” said Blanche, archly, “ that the ‘ Firefly ’ has not paddle boxes instead of a screw, we might have perched the musicians

on them without further trouble—a few on one side and a few on the other.”

“We must make up for this natural defect as best we may,” continued the Marquis. “If the night is fine and sultry we need not have any covering over the deck.”

“But we shall have the whole town staring with open eyes and mouth, if we are not protected in some way,” suggested Blanche.

“That is true,” and the Marquis knit his brows as if devising a remedy—“very true.” Again he paused. “I propose that the guests should be requested to arrive at one particular time, that they should be received in the saloon, and half an hour after the ‘Firefly’ should steam off.....”

“Not out to sea, we should have a hospital on board instead of a ball,” said Blanche, interrupting him rather maliciously.

“No, Mademoiselle, you run on too quickly; I was only going to suggest that the vessel should be anchored in the centre of the harbour.”

“That we might arrange; but now let us turn to the ball of to-night,” said Lord Reynoldforde. “What dress will you wear, Blanche? It must be something very *distingué*, for I wish you to make a sensation. What colour do you think suits her best, Montanvert?”

“Anything becomes Mademoiselle Farncourt, but if I am at liberty to offer an opinion I should say pink would look exquisite in her dark hair.”

Blanche frowned, and, as dinner was over, she rose hastily, unable to hide her displeasure. “I will order my dress, thank you,” and she swept towards the door; the Marquis was by her side in an instant, and, as he held the door open for her to pass, he whispered, in his softest tones—“Forgive

me, Mademoiselle, I would never have ventured so far, had it not been for your father." She did not even look at him, but passed on towards the stairs.

"You must excuse her, Montanvert," said Lord Reynoldforde, soothingly, "she is a spoilt child."

"She is angelic!" said the Marquis; "my feelings towards her are so deep nothing she could ever do would displease me." He paused, and then approaching his friend, said earnestly—"May I speak to you on a point relating to her?"

"Nothing has gone wrong, I hope?"

"No, nothing at all; and I hardly expect the announcement I am about to make will surprise you."

"Pray speak out," said Lord Reynoldforde, rather impatiently.

"Certainly I will, and I earnestly trust what I am about to communicate will in no way displease you, but if it should do so, let me beg your pardon beforehand, and I swear to let the subject rest for ever." He paused, and looked at his friend.

"Pray proceed."

"Alas! I read a refusal already in your eyes; my heart trembles, my happiness is blasted—yet I will speak out in justice to myself and to you, my noble friend—I love your daughter."

"The devil you do!" cried Lord Reynoldforde, frowning.

"Yes, with my whole heart; but I determined before seeking her hand to address myself to you. Should you oppose me, I will tear her image from me, I will look up to her as an angel far out of my reach, and swear never to breathe a word of love to her or you. Mademoiselle Farncourt knows nothing of this. I throw myself on your mercy, and wait for your decision with an aching heart."

"By Jove, Marquis, you are a better fellow than

I took you for. I like you, upon my honour, I do," and Lord Reynoldforde shook hands with his daughter's suitor. "But let me hear no more of this, you are old enough to be her father; don't be foolish; forget you ever dreamt of love; such a passion at your age cannot be very strong, and I should be very sorry to lose you as a friend."

The Marquis turned crimson at this mention of his age, but he checked the angry feelings that would have ruined him, and said in a mournful tone, "Yet you reject me as a son."

"Ha, ha! excuse me, Montanvert, but I must laugh; I never could have believed such a thing; you, my old playmate at school; you, who laughed at me for marrying. Ha, ha! to think of your wanting to become my son! to marry my daughter! ho, ho! hi, hi! this is a fine joke. Whatever put it into your head?"

The Marquis, had he been a lover of truth, would have said, "Money," but he put on a sentimental expression, and said in his softest tone, "Love!"

"Now, this is too ridiculous—let us talk no more about it," said Lord Reynoldforde, becoming suddenly grave, as the recollection of his wife's objection to the Marquis shot through his mind.

"We are all fools now and then. Excuse me, Montanvert, but you have been one to-day; I never could have imagined this, and if you say no more on the subject, but go on as usual, I shall believe it to have been an after dinner dream, conjured up by an extra bottle of port. Come, sit down, and let us drink together. Give me your glass—here's health to you, Marquis, and speedy oblivion to all your love fancies. Ha, ha!"

"I did not laugh at you nineteen years ago,

when you committed the folly, as you now call it, of marrying at two-and-twenty."

"Humph! we will not say much about that. I have not quite forgotten certain jovial scenes in Paris about that time, when I was made the laughing-stock of the whole room."

"Well, it was all youthful fun," said the Marquis. "The memory of those pleasant days always makes me melancholy, they will never return."

"Now, do not be sentimental again, we have had enough of that to-night. Here, fill your glass, and let us drink to old memories, and the jovial city of Paris."

Thus they sat chattering over their wine till the clock on the chimneypiece struck ten, and the vibration had scarcely ceased, when the door opened slowly, and Blanche sailed into the room with the air of conscious beauty.

Lord Reynoldforde set down the glass he was on the point of lifting to his lips, and said—

"By heavens! blue suits you best, I never saw you look so well."

Blanche smiled; she was always glad to please her father; she knew it had been her mother's aim. "Do you like my dress? It is quite new," said she, as she glanced down at it herself.

"White tarlatan looped up with the choicest blue flowers, a bouquet and wreath of the same, *charmant*, quite perfect," whispered the Marquis into Lord Reynoldforde's ear.

Blanche saw the movement and frowned; she felt that Montanvert had gained her father's confidence in spite of all her endeavours. She had not her mother's authority over her father, and knew not how to gain it. Poor Blanche! she began to

feel that she was helpless, and could only hope a change would come—but when? alas, it might be too late.

The news that an English lord and his lovely daughter, accompanied by a French Marquis, were to appear at the Assembly Rooms that evening, spread like wildfire through the little town of Brimelsea. Every ticket was accordingly bought up, and a few more decorations were added to the ball-room, besides an additional order for the very best ice, and refreshments of every kind.

CHAPTER X.

THE RIVALS.

“How glad I am to see you looking so well,” said Count Porskinski, as Maud entered the sitting-room on the following morning after the adventure, and found him accidentally alone, Miss Briggs being engaged in household concerns, and the other ladies in their own rooms.

“I have quite recovered, thank you, and will soon forget the fright I then experienced, though your kindness can never be forgotten.” Thus saying, Maud extended her hand to him, which he eagerly seized. “Let me tender you *our* gratitude, for I may safely speak in the name of my companions.....”

“Speak only in your own,” said he, interrupting her. “It was for you I made those exertions, for you alone.”

“Nay, I should be sorry to think your generosity so limited, and will do you more justice than you do yourself—you felt our lives were endangered, and you did the best you could to save us. We shall ever think of your conduct with gratitude.”

“We,” said the Count. “Why we? Do you not thank me for yourself alone?”

Maud smiled. "The thanks of many are more valuable than those of one."

"Ah, but I value yours only: it was the light of your eyes that inspired me to risk my life, I thought of you alone. Why then should I receive thanks from those I did not serve?"

"If what you say is truth, then indeed I must withdraw the gratitude which I am no longer authorised to express, but you may well imagine that I am sorry to do so." Maud turned away, and was about to quit the room, when, to her surprise and confusion, the Count threw himself on one knee before her, to prevent her retreat.

"Pardon," he exclaimed; "pardon me, most beautiful of women, forgive everything I have ever said, and listen to me now."

"Rise, I beg of you," cried Maud, greatly alarmed by his vehemence. "You cannot imagine such conduct pleasing to me; if you labour under this error, let me tell you once for all, that I cannot, and will not allow it."

"Cruel—you thank me, smile on me one moment, and the next you turn from me in anger."

"If I do," said Maud, taking a step back, "whose fault is it? Reflect, Count Porskinski, and your own conscience will tell you what is the cause."

He rose slowly. "If indeed I am the cause, heaven be praised. I can reform, can change, and mould myself to your liking—tell me how;" and he advanced towards her. Maud looked confused; what had she said—could her words be misconstrued? He stood before her waiting patiently, his eyes fixed on her face. She felt the colour mount to her cheek, and yet could not frame her thoughts into words. "Is my conduct so

totally objectionable to you, that you cannot express your abhorrence of it in terms sufficiently forcible?" asked the Count, in low tones.

"No," said Maud, recovering herself in some degree; "I was not thinking of your general conduct, only of this in particular. You may easily imagine it is difficult for me to express what I feel, but ask yourself, and you cannot fail to know. I am alarmed by your vehemence, and it dis.....yes, it displeases me excessively." Maud again approached the door.

"I will only detain you one moment longer," said the Count. "Your censure is harsh, but believe me you shall henceforth not have to complain of my conduct in any way."

"Thank you," said Maud, and she turned to go, but was met in the doorway by Miss Massing, who exclaimed on seeing her, "I have been searching for you this long time, Maud; the dressmaker has come, whom I ordered to call about your ball-dress; she is in my room."

"May I be allowed to ask if you are going to a ball?" inquired the Count, advancing towards them.

"My aunt has arranged it all; she says I am to go."

"And you would not think me impertinent if I were to ask where it takes place?"

"At the Assembly Rooms, next Monday."

"Thank you," said he, and the two ladies retired. The Count thus left to himself walked to the window (which in summer is as great an attraction to the gentlemen as the fire in winter), played on the panes with his fingers, hummed a tune, frowned, leaned farther out of the window, and watched a handsome looking man who was passing

at the time. "Donner und Blitz!" muttered the Count, as he drew in his head. The gentleman had stopped before the door, and was ringing the bell. "What business has he to come here? of course he wants to see her; I will prevent that if I can." Thus saying, he left the room, but quickly reappeared, bowing politely, and ushering in Captain Macklaren. "I am extremely sorry to tell you Miss Massing and her niece are at present engaged; they have this moment quitted me."

Count Porskinski's English was very broken, but we have corrected his errors in the present instance, as in many others.

"I would not for worlds disturb them," said Captain Macklaren, "and will therefore do myself the pleasure of calling again."

This was not what the Count intended, and he therefore continued, hurriedly—"There is no occasion, I am sure, for you to give yourself that trouble. I should be most happy to deliver any message for you; pray be seated."

"Thank you, I will not detain you, as I see you are on the point of going out."

"Pray do not mention that, my time is at your disposal. I am, alas! not a man of business."

Captain Macklaren bowed, and resting his hat on the top of his cane, said, "I only came to inquire after Miss Erving's health; I shall pay my respects to her at a later hour, as you say she is at present engaged."

"I have the happiness to be able to assure you that Miss Erving is quite well, and not a trace of her indisposition is left; she quitted me but a few minutes before your arrival, to make some arrange-

ments with regard to her attire at the coming ball, and seemed in perfect health and spirits."

"I am glad to hear it, and will now take my leave," said Captain Macklaren, moving towards the door, the handle of which Count Porskinski still held in his hand.

"Which way are you going? my road may be the same as yours," said the latter. "I want to ask you a few questions about this ball, if I may take the liberty." Captain Macklaren named the direction, and the two left the house together.

"I hope you do not experience any inconvenience from the extraordinary exertions you underwent yesterday?" said the Captain, looking at his strange companion. "You performed a marvellous feat; it will be the talk of the neighbourhood for some time to come, I assure you."

Count Porskinski smiled, as he said, "Oh! it was nothing at all."

"Nothing at all! I do not believe any of our tight-rope dancers could have done such a thing. You are perhaps experienced in mountain travelling."

"Yes, from a mere child. I lived a great deal in the Tyrol, and since then I have frequently hunted the chamois, both in Switzerland and in the Tyrol; it is a noble sport, full of adventure and peril."

"You are not, I think, a native of that part of Germany."

"No, I come from Poland, though but a short part of my life has been spent in my native land, and that not the happiest. You have, of course, heard of our national troubles, and can doubtless imagine the cause of my estrangement from a land that I should call my home."

“ Yes, indeed, there are few who are unacquainted with Poland’s misfortunes.”

“ And few who offer their assistance to aid it to regain its freedom,” murmured the Pole, in an under tone; then turning to his companion, he said aloud, “ Are you to be present at this ball?” The answer was in the affirmative. “ Is it then a public ball; could any one go who chose?”

“ Any one who takes a ticket. We are passing the door of the Assembly Rooms now; here is an advertisement; you will find all the particulars mentioned there.”

Count Porskinski began reading. “ I have never witnessed a ball in England,” he said, at length. “ I think I should like to go to this one; where are the tickets to be obtained? I see no mention of that on this board.”

“ They are to be had here,” replied the Captain. “ The price is reasonable. I must wish you good morning now, as I have some business to which I must attend before dinner. Good morning. If you see Miss Erving before I do, perhaps you will be so kind as to say my mother, Lady Macklaren, will call on her this afternoon.”

The two gentlemen bowed; the Count had procured the information he required respecting the ball, and had gained his object in preventing a meeting between the Captain and Maud.

That evening, at dinner, Count Porskinski leaned across the table to Maud, who was seated opposite him, and said—“ I too have taken a ticket for the ball; they say fever is infectious: perhaps pleasure is so likewise. Your friend, Captain Macklaren, inspired me with a wish to go, and as we were passing the door of the Assembly Rooms, I went in and bought a ticket.”

“What ball are you speaking about, Count Porskinski?” asked Miss Bridges.

“One that is to take place in the town.”

“Oh!” And to change the subject Miss Bridges demanded how Miss Carpenter and Miss Smith were after their accident. She laid particular stress on the last person’s name. The reply was, that they both had colds.

“That is sad news,” continued the lady. “Miss Carpenter’s valuable assistance will be lost to the parish, and the school will suffer; but I doubt not her attentive brother will not object to officiate there in her stead; he is such a good friend to Miss Smith. I heard that he even condescended to walk arm in arm with her yesterday.”

“Yes,” said Miss Massing, joining in the conversation. “He was so anxious about his sister, that he took an active part in rescuing them, and was kind enough to see Miss Smith home; he is a very amiable young man, though he is not clever.”

“Extremely amiable,” echoed Miss Bridges; and then, in an under tone, she added to her confidante, “We know why in this instance, do we not, Mrs. Blount?” A meaning look was her only reply.

“May I ask, if I have been rightly informed, when I say that an engagement has actually taken place between Mr. Carpenter and Miss Smith?” demanded Miss Bridges, turning to Maud. “The report is widely circulated, I assure you.”

“The charge is false, I am convinced,” said Miss Massing, reddening. “Lydia has not the smallest knowledge of any such engagement. I can fully trust in her discretion, and therefore deny the report altogether, and shall feel obliged to you, Miss Bridges,

to do the same, whenever you hear the subject mentioned."

"Mr. Pipkin has heard the same thing, and informed me of it yesterday. I should think it my duty to acquaint Miss Carpenter of what is said, for she can then take steps accordingly; or, perhaps, as you are more intimate with her than I am, she would take it more seriously from you." Miss Bridges looked supremely consequential, as she delivered herself of this speech.

"Thank you, but as I disbelieve the charge so entirely, I decline taking any part in the affair."

"But it relates to your friend's honour," persisted Miss Bridges. "Her brother's name is mentioned disrespectfully; it creates a scandal in the town."

"The punishment will fall on the right head," said Miss Massing, indifferently. "I never believe town gossip."

"Quite right," joined in the mistress of the Establishment, from the head of the table. "Gossip is the plague of society. And now, ladies and gentlemen, if it is agreeable to you, we will retire."

There was a general scraping of chairs, waving of napkins, and rustling of dresses, as the whole party moved up stairs to the common sitting-room. Mrs. Blount threw herself on the sofa as usual, arranged her dress, so that the folds should look graceful, and after many turns and twists, had settled herself to her entire satisfaction. A game of cards was proposed; some consented to it, and a table was arranged by the open window. Miss Massing understood whist very well, and liked it; Miss Briggs also played. Maud, at the Count's desire, sang a succession of German songs, whilst he sat by her, and turned over the leaves of her

music book. Miss Bridges was out of humour, would not join in anything, but sat for some time in a corner by herself, eyeing the Count and Maud now and then with a spiteful expression.

"Would you not like to take my hand?" asked Miss Briggs, addressing her uneasily, and offering her the cards.

"No, thank you," was the short rejoinder.

"Pray make yourself more comfortable, dear," murmured Mrs. Blount languidly, from the sofa.

"I am very well as I am, thank you; and it is fortunate, considering that you always monopolize the most comfortable seat in the room." Mrs. Blount was not accustomed to such attacks from her friend; she looked surprised, put the smelling-bottle frequently to her nose, and complained of faintness. "Always ill, always something the matter—such stuff and nonsense!" muttered Miss Bridges, in an audible whisper.

Miss Massing looked distressed at the scene that was enacting, excused herself for one moment to her partner, and went across the room to bring a footstool for the irritable, middle-aged lady, in the corner.

"Very obliging, indeed," said that lady, ironically, as soon as she understood the movement. "A wholly unmerited attention, I am sure. My feet, however, prefer the ground."

Miss Massing quietly placed the footstool on the floor, and returned to her place.

That night, as she went into her own room, Maud heard her exclaim sorrowfully, "Spite, spite! I wish I could avoid exciting such a feeling!"

"Dear old aunt," thought Maud, "as if any one could be spiteful to her!"

Yet so it was.

“How is it that you never married, aunt Lucy?” asked Maud, one afternoon, as she sat on a low footstool in Miss Massing’s little boudoir, and leaned her head upon her aunt’s knee, as she used to do when quite a child.

“Because I was a coward,” replied the old lady, setting down her work.

“A coward?” repeated Maud.

“Yes, that is the right word to use: I was afraid to marry. I had read and heard of so many bad marriages, that I feared to take so important a step. I thought myself better suited for a single life, so you see I have kept my resolution.”

“You never could have been in love then,” said Maud, confidently.

“Only once,” was the rejoinder, uttered in a low tone, and with the head averted.

“How could it happen then that.....”

Maud had turned to look into her aunt’s face, and saw a tear glistening in the downcast eye; she paused, and felt sorry she had touched a painful chord in that kind heart. She had been hasty; had forgotten that there are some feelings treasured up within the breast which never fade, never grow old, but live on with us, dormant at times, yet ready to be awakened at the slightest call.

“Have I pained you, dear aunt?” said Maud, throwing her arms round her. “If I have, I am so very, very sorry.”

Miss Massing returned the embrace warmly, but did not speak; and when, at length, Maud released her, she looked up through her tears, and said—

“I am very silly, that is all. You reminded me of by-gone days, and the tears would come.....”

there, it is all right now, we will talk of other things. Has your ball dress come back?—I am so puzzled as to what I must wear myself. I think the black satin would look very nice with a pelerine, and my china crape shawl; don't you think so, Maud?"

Miss Massing's black satin had been in existence a very long time; and even when new, the make was so old fashioned, it was long before the dress-maker could be persuaded to undertake to shape the pattern according to Miss Massing's views.

"My dear aunt, you do not mean the dress you wore a few evenings back? It is so old fashioned you must have something newer than that."

"Oh! as to old fashioned, that is no consequence at all. I prefer it to your new-fangled ways of ribbons, puffs, and furbelows; give me my neat waist and short skirts, that do not catch up all the dust and mud. No, no, Maud, you may be a fashionable young lady if you like, but your old aunt must keep to her fancies."

"Well, then, you shall; but have you nothing but that black satin?" asked Maud, disconsolately.

"It is a very nice gown, I am sure," pleaded Miss Massing. "It has been a good servant to me. I have worn it these many times; it will look so nice with a pelerine."

Maud said nothing, but secretly determined in her own mind to buy her aunt a new dress, and have it made (without saying a word) by Lady Macklaren's dressmaker. Her plans were soon arranged, and put in execution. The scheme for Miss Massing's decoration at the ball prospered, but still that lady herself knew nothing of what was going forward. At length the long-expected

Monday came, and with it the new dress. Maud was puzzled how to present it; she feared her aunt might be vexed with her, and still more that she would refuse to wear it.

After some deliberation, she settled in her own mind, to place it on Miss Massing's bed, when dressing time should come. This she did and more, for she carried off the old black satin in triumph to her room, and waited there, expecting to hear some unusual uproar, when her aunt should make the discovery of her secret present; but no sound reached her ears; she dressed, and proceeded to Miss Massing's sitting-room, opened the door, and there stood her aunt before her, in the dress, but, alas! the trimmings and ornaments lay scattered on the floor, and she was even then in the act of cutting off the lace fall Maud had taken such pleasure in ordering.

"Oh! aunt!" was all she said.

"Coming in one minute, dear; you see how well your present looks, now that people can see it. I am so much obliged to you; it was very thoughtful of you, indeed, and I shall wear it with the greatest pleasure *now*. Just wait one instant; this piece of lace has been sewn on, as if it were never to come off again—there—pretty stuff—not suited to old women like me though; you had better make something for yourself with it. Am I not neat now? My China crape shawl will be just the thing to wear with it. What do you think about my pelerine?"

The door-bell rang at that moment; it was the fly to take them to the Assembly Rooms. Maud begged her aunt to come, and half vexed, half smiling, she led her down stairs. Count Por-

skinski was in the entrance ; his eye brightened as he gazed on Maud in her ball costume ; and he thought he had never seen any woman so beautiful, when she smilingly consented to let him hand her into the carriage.

CHAPTER XI.

THE ASSEMBLY ROOMS.

IT was with queen-like majesty that Blanche Farn-court sailed into the ball-room, leaning on the arm of her handsome father. All eyes were turned towards them ; the room was full ; and they entered during one of those intervals which always occurs between the dances. There was many an exclamation of delight and admiration, but no face in the whole assembly betrayed more real pleasure than that of Maud Erving, as she recognized her old school friend. Hastening across the floor, she stood beside Blanche, and shaking her eagerly by the hand, she said—

“ I did not expect to see you here ; you never told me of this ; how delighted I am. This is indeed a surprise ! ”

“ Just what I wished it to be, Maud ; but I did not expect to be at this ball myself ; and I assure you I am almost as surprised at my own apparition here as you are ; let me introduce you to my father.”

Then turning to Lord Reynoldforde, she said—

“ This is *the* Maud you have heard so much about ; we have not met since our school days.”

“ Delighted to make your acquaintance, Miss Erving ; I used to know your father in old times,” said Lord Reynoldforde, cordially. “ By Jove, is not she beautiful ?” added he, in a whisper, to the Marquis, who had stepped in behind him.

“ Very passable,” was the cool rejoinder.

“ Your face reminds me so much of our old school pranks,” said Blanche, smiling. “ I almost imagine myself with Mademoiselle Lafoure again. By the by, Maud, you will have the pleasure of seeing her kind face before long ; she is going to spend the holidays with me.”

“ What, at Brimelsea ?”

“ Yes.”

The music struck up once more ; it was one of D’Albert’s spirited waltzes, that oblige the feet to move in time to them, whether they will or no.

Count Porskinski threaded his way through the crowd, and approached Maud, when, bowing low, he said, “ He believed he had the honour of being engaged to her for that dance.” Maud assented, took his arm, and they were soon whirling amidst the other teetotums that passed in quick succession before our new arrivals. Blanche watched them dreamily, and wondered who Maud’s partner was. They then passed on to an inner room, less crowded, where her father handed her to a seat. She had scarcely been settled an instant, when the Marquis, who had naturally followed them, approached her chair, and leaning his hand on the back of it, addressed her thus—

“ May I hope for the honour of your hand this dance ?”

“ Thank you,” replied Blanche, somewhat coldly.
“ I should prefer remaining quiet just now.”

“ This preference will not, I hope, extend over the whole evening. May I look forward to the next ?”

Blanche bowed a cold acquiescence, and turned to her father, who was talking to a gentleman of his acquaintance. Just then, the dance being concluded, an influx of people crowded into the room ; amongst them is a gentleman we have seen before, though under very different circumstances.

“ Ah ! Lord Reynoldforde ! You have not forgotten an old friend, I hope ?” said he, advancing, in company with another gentleman.

“ Holford ? to be sure I have not ; and Captain Bissenthorpe—we have had the pleasure of meeting before.”

“ Yes, in London,” said the officer addressed, taking the hand extended to him.

Captain Bissenthorpe was a tall man, with a round, sallow face, red hair, and enormous whiskers and mustachoes, of which he was evidently very proud. He was at that time quartered, with his regiment, in Brimelsea.

Lord Reynoldforde introduced the young men to his daughter, and Blanche was soon deeply engaged. The Marquis insisted on writing his name down for a few more dances, and though her coldness would have chilled most men, it in no way disconcerted him.

“ Our dance has begun, Mademoiselle,” he said, interrupting a conversation she had entered into with Mr. Holford. “ Will you not join it ? The music is *superbe*.” Blanche rose, and taking his arm, they pushed their way through the crowd into the dancing-room. The Marquis was famed for the

elegance and ease with which he danced ; and they floated round the room to the spirit stirring music. Blanche was fond of dancing ; it was no exertion to her ; she could accommodate herself to any speed ; and she felt an inward satisfaction in acknowledging to herself that they were the best dancers in the room, and drew most eyes upon them. Her heart warmed with excitement ; and when they paused for a moment to rest, the stiffness in her manner to her partner was gone ; she listened to all he said, and even went so far as to quiz some of the awkward dancers reeling convulsively before them. The Marquis saw this change ; attributed it to the right cause ; restrained from flattering her on her dancing, as many men would have done, for he knew too well that that was a sure way to lose all he had gained, and found himself writing his name on her card without opposition, for the few remaining dances for which she was not engaged.

“ How you would enjoy our Paris balls ; we understand the art of dancing. In England it is considered more a necessity than a pleasure ; with us it is all enjoyment. Lord Reynoldforde must take you for one season to Paris ; you cannot imagine how beautiful our capital is ; for my part I wonder how any one exists anywhere else.”

Blanche had heard much of Paris ; her mother had taught her to look at the dark side of its daily history ; she dreaded the mere idea of going there with her father, and it was fear lest the Marquis should put such a notion in his head, that prompted her to make the following speech—

“ Paris may be all that is beautiful, but *I* have no wish to go there ; my reasons for disliking it cannot be wholly unknown to you, and I must beg

of you never to mention such an idea to my father; he is easily impressed with the views of others, as you cannot fail to know; but when once his mind is bent on an object nothing can move him. Once for all, then, let me beg of you never so much as to breathe the slightest whisper of what you have just said to me."

The Marquis assured her he had not the least intention of doing so: her wishes were regarded by him as law: he only wished she would oftener express them to him: he had, he flattered himself, some influence over her father: he might often exert it in her cause: he begged her pardon if his openness offended: hoped she would learn to judge him less harshly than she had hitherto done: he was deeply attached to her family: had been so for long: could remember her a little infant in arms: had nursed her then: professed an almost fatherly interest in her, and finally carried her off into the maze of the dance. Was there no warning voice, "Beware of that man," ringing in Blanche's ear? We cannot tell.

Miss Massing and Lady Macklaren were seated on a bench in the ball-room, Maud was beside them; she had not danced the last time; she was afraid of tiring herself too much, as she had not recovered all her usual strength. Count Porskinski was not beside her, neither was Captain Macklaren—they were both leaning against the wall close by, and the seat next Maud was occupied by a girl who, from her appearance, could not have been more than fifteen or sixteen; she was talking rapidly to Maud, scarcely waiting for answers to her numerous questions, but went on in a continued stream.

She was evidently one of those young ladies who

have been "out," as it is called, ever since they left the nursery: she considered it *infra dig.* to be supposed to have school hours and masters: talked of the officers in the room: called Captain Bissenthorpe a "dear man:" recounted to Maud many flirtations she had had with him, and repeated some of his letters by heart, for she had received several from him with verses and flowers: he always walked with her on the parade, professed himself devoted, and had actually stolen her pocket-handkerchief when, by accident, she had let it fall. Maud was not slow in discovering that this same Captain Bissenthorpe was one of those men who delight in making young girls of fifteen or sixteen fall in love with them, at least they always imagine they succeed, though they little know how often they are detested for their pains.

Miss Isabella Flounce was a regular school-girl by nature; she never lost an opportunity of telling her secret love affairs, and always with the strictest confidence. Maud had only known her a quarter of an hour, but that was quite long enough acquaintance for Miss Flounce, and by the time the dance was over, she had told Maud everything connected with Captain Bissenthorpe, from his fortune and expectations down to his little foot, which no shoemaker in all Brimelsea could fit; having exhausted this topic she turned to another, and told Maud, with bitter lamentations, that she was going home.

"Is it not a bore? I have been in this dear town a month, and now that I have just got to know people and call them nicknames, I am sent for to return to that tiresome home. I wish uncle Frederick would keep me, but I fancy I am too fast for him; his daughters are so very slow, there

is Susan, she can't say Bo to a goose, and as for walking with me alone on the parade, I believe she would as soon fly. Captain Bissenthorpe laughs at her, and says I am twice as good a chap."

Maud was horrified at the vulgarity of this conversation, and felt greatly relieved to see Captain Macklaren make a move towards them to claim her hand for that dance.

Poor Miss Flounce remained sitting, much to her dissatisfaction, and though she directed several glances at Captain Bissenthorpe, he never came near her, and to her infinite disgust, she saw him dancing with "that proud-looking Miss Farncourt; how could anybody call her handsome? she never smiled; she danced as if she did not like it, she was anything but graceful;" in short, Blanche would have become a perfect Gorgon in Miss Isabella Flounce's eyes if her thoughts had not been pleasingly diverted by Count Porskinski's approach; he seated himself in Maud's place, and though he did not offer to dance with her, he talked, and his English was so "very interesting."

"What a nice couple your niece and my son make," said Lady Macklaren to Miss Massing.

"He is so handsome and manly," rejoined the latter, "he would look well anywhere."

"Roger always was a handsome boy. I suppose you do not remember him with curls all over his head, and a little plaid low dress, with band and silver buckle. People used to admire him very much, but none more than his fond mother. He was my only child—he had all my love. I may be excused if I spoilt him a little, may I not? Ah, you do not understand a mother's feelings; it is impossible you can, they are only felt by mothers."

Miss Massing smiled.

“Have you been successful in your dredging expedition?” asked Maud of her partner. “Yesterday was very fine.”

“I was interrupted just as I was on the point of starting; my friend Holford made his appearance rather suddenly. I asked him to come and spend a few weeks with us, as his relations are on the continent at present, but we did not expect him so soon. He wanted to accompany me that moment, but of course I put it off; we think of going out to-morrow, the cases are all prepared to receive their prisoners. You must come with your aunt and see them.”

Maud said she should enjoy doing so very much, and he continued—

“I have a case in each window looking on the staircase; my mother would not allow them to be in the drawing-room, she says she likes air and light, and they would effectually exclude both. She lives on the balcony. I assure you I never go into the drawing-room but there my mother is certain to be. I tell her she is a gossip, and is looking out for news,” he glanced at his mother as he said this jokingly, and their eyes met. “How is your collection progressing, Miss Erving? If you happen not to have purchased a case yet, I hope you will permit me to offer you one of mine; I have more than I can possibly want, and should feel honoured by your acceptance of one.”

“You are very kind indeed, but, as I have no fixed home, I am unable to keep a regular aquarium, and must set all my prisoners free when I leave Brimelsea.”

“That is a long time to look forward to I hope, Miss Erving. Why not accept one of my cases whilst you are here?”

Maud assured him that her basins and baths answered her purpose quite well enough, and he pressed her no longer to accept his offer, but changed the subject. "Have you read many books on this branch of natural history?"

"Several of Gosse's works, but I am ashamed to say I am very lazy about reading, I find it so difficult to fix my attention."

"I should not have thought that; perhaps you read a great many works of fiction?"

"Yes, there you are right; I waste a great deal of time over novels. My guardian belongs to a library, and we get all the newest works in London. Have you read 'Claude Mertonby,' by Greenwark?"

"Yes; what is your opinion of it?"

"I think it very clever; the characters are well drawn, but the story is weak."

"That is often the case. I think some authors must imagine their characters first, and make their story so as to fit them, whilst others reverse the order of things. People cannot succeed in all they attempt—there are very few who reach perfection."

Their discussion was here interrupted by the sudden finale of the dance, and they went to rejoin their party; in threading through the crowd Maud encountered Blanche.

"I am glad we have met again," said the latter. "Where are your friends? Will you introduce them to me? I want to talk to you, Maud; so let us go together."

Thus saying she bowed to Captain Bissenthorpe, with whom she had been dancing, and took her friend's hand. Maud led her up to her aunt, who was of course delighted to be introduced to her dear niece's friend, and, after a few commonplace re-

marks, the two seated themselves on the bench beside her, and it was not long before they were fully engrossed in conversation.

“Are you actually living in a boarding-house, Maud?” asked her friend, smiling.

“Yes; you cannot imagine how odd it is; the etiquette and the rules make it excessively amusing; quite different to anything I have ever seen before.”

“Do the old ladies quarrel?”

Maud smiled. “On the whole we are very peaceably inclined, but such a thing as a quarrel is known, and, from what I have seen, I should say jealousies exist to no small extent.”

“Do you know I almost fancy I should like to be in your place, it would be something new, and there is a sad want of novelty in this world. I should astonish the old ladies very much, but I would be extremely polite and attentive at the same time; they should have nothing to say against me, only it would be entertaining to make them open their eyes or put up their spectacles to see what I was.”

“Blanche!” said Maud, reproachfully.

“That is just the face you used to put on at school,” continued the other. “If ever I proposed to have any fun, you were sure to say ‘Blanche!’ in that reproving way, just as if I were about to commit a crime; but, Maud, I have grown very quiet since I left school, you will hardly know me now, though the sight of your face makes me my old self just for a minute. There, see—I am quite as sedate as you are now, and have a great deal more experience in life.”

“I do not dispute that last assertion, and you know our characters were often considered very

much alike, although I never could see the resemblance," said Maud, looking up into her friend's face as if to read the mystery of her character in her eyes.

Blanche looked grave and answered quickly—

"No, we are very unlike each other. I hope you will never be like me. I should be sorry to think any one was;" then drawing herself up she sighed slightly, and the next moment, with an effort to suppress all feelings of sorrow, she smiled, and said, almost merrily—

"We must not grow sentimental over our iniquities, but let us talk of something else; you must find a topic, Maud, my ideas are all gone."

"That is not a difficult task with you, though it is sometimes an impossibility with a partner. By the by, who was that handsome man you were dancing with, when I met you? he is looking at us now, Blanche—there, in the doorway."

"Captain Bissenthorpe! you cannot possibly think him handsome? He has a turnip-lantern face."

"What do you mean?"

"He looks exactly like one of those lanterns we used to make and hang round the school-room at poor Mademoiselle Lafoure's, to her great horror. His face is as round as a ball, his red moustache makes his mouth look transparent, and his eyes are quite as bright a red as our old lanterns could ever boast of. Do you not agree with me?"

"Not at all; and I am quite sure the poor man would be very sorry if he heard your opinion of his charms."

"Why?" asked Blanche, abstractedly.

"Why? because he admires you very much."

"You have very quick eyes, Maud."

“Do you mean to say you have not discovered that? it was quite evident to me, though I only saw you together for two minutes.”

“I never thought about it; he was very stupid.”

“You managed to laugh and talk a great deal.”

“I was obliged to do that, or I should have gone to sleep; he dances abominably, and only knows how to talk nonsense.” Blanche looked at her list of engagements. “Very tiresome!” she muttered.

“What is?” asked Maud.

“I am engaged to him for three more dances. Oh, here comes the Marquis, we shall be separated again, and perhaps I shall not have another opportunity of speaking to you. We must meet to-morrow, Maud—tell me how. Mademoiselle Lafoure arrives in the afternoon, we might meet her at the station; do you agree to this?”

Maud said she had no engagement, and the friends parted. There was a very different expression on Blanche’s face as she took the Marquis de Montanvert’s arm; the pleased smile was gone, and a proud, heartless one, was all his brilliant conversation could call forth. “I must treat him civilly, because he is my father’s friend,” was ever recurring to her mind; “but if ever I have it in my power, he shall be banished,” and they whirled gracefully together through the room.

“Holford,” said Captain Macklaren to his friend, “may I introduce you to the most beautiful girl here to-night?”

“Thank you, I have already been introduced,” was the reply.

“Indeed!” exclaimed the other. “Perhaps we mistake each other.”

“Very likely, my dear friend,” was the laconic rejoinder, and Captain Macklaren continued—

“I mean Miss Erving.”

“And I mean Miss Farncourt.”

“I don’t agree with you, Holford, but tastes must differ. May I introduce you to my beauty?”

“With the greatest pleasure;” and the two gentlemen crossed over to where Maud was seated, but ere they had reached her, Count Porskinski had stepped in and carried off the prize.

“We had not enough sail on, Captain,” said Mr. Holford. “Shall we give the Frenchman a broadside?”

“Better luck next time.”

“I am not fond of being beaten—must we give in? perhaps a charge would settle the matter—come on.”

Captain Macklaren put his arm within his impetuous friend’s, and drew him aside. “I am going out yachting to-morrow with Lord Reynoldforde, and shall have the pleasure of the Hon. Miss Farncourt’s society. Wish me joy, Macklaren; a young fellow has not often such advantages.”

“Who is she dancing with now?” asked his friend.

“I don’t exactly know. Some upstart foreigner, I suppose; he must be bowled over, of course.”

“I have been told he is engaged to Miss Farncourt. You had better make inquiries before you lose your heart, Holford.”

“It is gone already. Do you suppose, my dear fellow, that I ever was in the company of a beautiful woman, without losing it there and then?”

“A very harmless attack,” said Captain Macklaren; “but take care you are not caught.”

“Caught! I am always on the point of being caught. Don’t you remember rescuing me from a marriage with that beautiful Spanish girl? I am

very much obliged to you now; she had a temper—you were right, only love's eyes are blind, and she was so devilish handsome. Such eyes, such hair—oh!”

“The Hon. Miss Farncourt is far more beautiful,” suggested his friend, smiling.

“Beautiful! that is a poor word to describe what she is—I never saw anything mortal so exquisite. Just see how she floats about, looking so supremely proud and angelic at the same time! What an exquisitely rounded neck! by Jove! I believe I could turn artist, sculptor, and nobody knows what in looking at her; but then, Macklaren—she is quite half an inch taller than I am—what is to be done? We can never walk arm-in-arm.”

“I hope you will never have any occasion. Take my advice, and get your heart back as soon as possible.”

“As convenient,” interrupted the other, laughing; “that is not so easy. Besides, I do not approve of your advice; supposing I do fall desperately in love (no uncommon thing with me), and she returns my affections, it would be a brilliant connexion. Plenty of money, if her scamp of a father does not run through it all; he has not done so yet, or yonder French puppy would not be nibbling at the bait. It is high time we had another European war.”

“What makes you end with that bloody-minded sentiment?” demanded Captain Macklaren, laughing at his friend's sudden change from love to war.

“England is overrun with all the ragamuffins of the Continent. We shall soon be no better than a penal settlement, with the exception that the con-

victs are all at liberty, and enjoying themselves at our expense. We want a war to clear them off; besides, it would do our own people a great deal of good, take my word for it. A good downright war would cut off all the murderers, thieves, and rascals that one hears of at every step now. By heavens, Macklaren, just look!" and he pointed in the direction of Blanche.

"Well, what is the matter?"

"Oh, nothing, only she is supremely beautiful."

"Pshaw! Holford, don't be a fool. She is nothing more or less than a woman. I see what the end of all this will be."

"A suicide, a case of drowning," interrupted the young man.

"No, a second Donna Isabella affair! a desperate attachment—a rebuff from the father—a wild notion of rope ladders, swift horses, and a flight just put a stop to in time by the interference of a friend—a fortnight's misery and absence, during which time the patient recovers, awakes to a sense of reason, and forgets."

"No, my dear fellow, don't say that. I never cared particularly about her; it was only a day-dream, very unlike my present feelings. You helped me out of a scrape there, I confess; but for the life of me I see no scrape to get out of in the present instance. A beautiful girl, a fine fortune and good connexions, what can a man wish for more?"

"An amiable wife, clever, agreeable."

"Oh, yes, of course; but Miss Farncourt would be all that."

"Are you sure? Remember love at first sight, in a ball-room."

"The most trying position to see a young lady

in. Why, if she has a bad temper, surely it must be seen then, bored as she is with bad partners, who tread on her feet, and talk nonsense till she is wearied to death."

"Have you ever seen a lady in a passion in a ball-room, Holford?"

"Thank heaven, no."

"Well, then, promise me you will make an excuse to-morrow, and accompany me out dredging. You shall have good sport, and if after that you still wish to try your hand at love-making, I will not prevent you."

The dancers had driven them by degrees nearer and nearer to the bench by the wall, and for the last quarter of an hour they had been unconsciously standing before a young lady, whose quick and willing ear had caught most of their conversation. It was not till Captain Macklaren had delivered himself of this last speech, that he perceived how easily they might have been overheard; but hoping the music had been too loud, and their conversation had been uttered in too low a tone for eaves-droppers, he contented himself by warning his friend in a whisper, and taking the first opportunity of an opening in the dance, they crossed over to the other side of the room.

"So," thought Miss Flounce, for it was none other than she, "this is a fine piece of news! a Captain Macklaren is in love with Miss Farncourt (the very lady Captain Bissenthorpe danced with), and a Mr. Holford is doing his best to bring his friend to his senses."

Miss Flounce was accustomed to eaves-dropping; she was very curious by nature, and always practised the art when an opportunity offered itself, but strange to say, with all her ingenuity in unravelling

mysteries, she invariably reversed the order of things, and changed persons, dates, and circumstances, retaining only the outside shell of the story. With the greatest impatience she waited till the dance was over, she was longing to relate her adventure to some one, and she listened eagerly for the concluding chords that should announce the finale; they came over and over again in her imagination, but still the dancers went whirling on, and the instruments crashed joyously, as if to mock her for thinking they could be tired. Miss Flounce yawned behind her fan (it was lucky she did not hear Miss Massing's exclamation of, "Poor child, she ought to be in bed!"), arranged her dress, moved her position, but could not entirely quell her impatience. At length, oh, it was a joyful silence to her, the music ceased, and Maud with Count Porskinski approached her; a seat was vacant by her side, Maud took it, and with a bow her partner retired. The moment for the disclosure had arrived, and Miss Flounce rushed joyfully into it.

"What do you think, my dear Miss Erving? I have had such fun whilst you have been dancing, I would not have been away for worlds. Such a thing, such a curious disclosure!"

"Indeed!" said Maud, carelessly.

"Yes," continued her friend; "you cannot possibly guess what it is."

"Perhaps it would not interest me," said Maud, coldly. "I do not like mysteries and secrets."

"But this is not one; at least not exactly. It relates to your friend, Captain Macklaren."

Maud turned, and looked at her. She felt ashamed of herself for feeling interested in a piece of gossip, and yet she could not help it.

“ Ah !” cried Miss Flouce, triumphantly. “ I have interested you now ; but, unfortunately, it is nothing you would like to hear, as the mere mention of his name makes you start.”

“ Why do you wish to tell it to me, if you think I should be sorry to hear it ? Perhaps, too, it is something I had better not know.”

Maud could not help feeling that the story might be complimentary to herself, and she was wholly unprepared for the narration that followed. She listened attentively, however, till the story was ended, and then said, smiling—

“ I must beg your pardon, but I am quite convinced you have changed the names of the two gentlemen. It is very unlikely Captain Macklaren should fall in love with a lady to whom he had never spoken, and knew nothing of. Besides, how does it happen that Lord Reynoldforde should invite a gentleman he has never been introduced to, and of whose very name he is ignorant ; at least he was so up to the moment of his entering this room. Then, to give you another proof, Captain Macklaren is the person who intends going out dredging, so that he must have persuaded Mr. Holford to accompany him.”

Miss Flouce looked greatly disconcerted, and said, pouting her lips, and frowning slightly, like a spoilt child, “ I see you are just the girl to throw cold water on a good story ; I wish I had not told it to you.”

“ Change the names, and you will be correct. But I should advise you to say no more about it, as such bits of gossip, never intended for your ear, can do no good by being repeated.”

Miss Flouce laughed at Maud’s scruples, and assured her she meant to amuse her uncle Frederick

with it, and papa, when she had gone back to "that tiresome home."

Here all further discussion was put an end to by the sudden appearance of both the heroes, and aghast, lest her communication should have been likewise overheard, Miss Flounce retired to the side of her aunt and chaperone, who sat with her two daughters at the farther extremity of the ball-room, and there had the great satisfaction of again repeating, with a few embellishments, all that had occurred.

It was a late, or rather an early hour, when the ball broke up. Lord Reynoldforde and his daughter were amongst the last to retire, and the faint streak of morning overspread the gray sky as they drove to their hotel. He spoke in raptures of the ball, of the friends he had met, and of the excursions they would have. He praised Blanche for having thought of coming to Brimelsea; said she should not repent her choice, and should see as much as she liked of her friend, Miss Erving, whose beauty he raved about. Blanche answered with monosyllables, looked out of the window of the carriage towards the east, and thought how pure and calm the scene was, in comparison to the revelry, excitement, and bustle they had just left. Was she happy? No. Why was she discontented? She had received admiration, nay, homage to her heart's content; but there was a feeling of loneliness, distrust, and weariness at her heart; there was a world of unsatisfied longings within her breast; she knew not why, she did not try to know.

Poor Blanche! her hours of happiness had been few and short. The world, with all its cares, had broken in upon her young dreams; it had not

banished them, she was of too imaginative a temperament for that, but it had chilled them; had made them dreams of sorrow, not of brightness. She gazed into the future with mistrust; all appeared false in her eyes; she even doubted herself. The only human being to whom she would have communicated her thoughts and feelings, was her mother, and she was dead; her very memory did but tend to increase the morbid sentiments that were daily growing more strong within her; she did not combat them, she liked to think of the world as a blank; she liked her dreams, she did not care to search into things to find the good; she believed it was there, but it suited her better to think of the bad, to think herself unhappy, and to imagine a dim future of woe, not real woe, but soft melancholy, extending over all her days, till she should drop into the grave and find rest.

Poor Blanche, may she never wake to the sense of real woe! The young heart is ever ready to receive impressions; sad it is, when sorrow is the first that wakes it from its day-dreams; sorrow for the wickedness that meets its eye; sorrow that the one being, who ought to be most dear, should prove unworthy of such pure affection.

CHAPTER XII.

THE DISCOVERY.

WE need not go far, or seek in foreign lands amidst heathen nations, true-hearted missionaries of the Word of God; we may find them in our own homes, working as zealously around us, though unseen. Their trials are often greater, for it is harder to endure suffering of mind than body; harder to bear the petty vexations of every day life, than the greater calamities adventure and enterprise bring down upon us.

Lydia Carpenter was one of these home missionaries; she had devoted her life to good works; it was not the regularity and self-discipline such a life entails, which she found irksome; nor was it the labour amongst the poor, the schools, and the parish, but her position in her own family circle. Lydia had to struggle against prejudice and misjudgment. Her mother was an invalid, often irritable, and at times even passionate. She could not understand her daughter's disposition, and mistrusted her views. Mrs. Carpenter's father had been a Wesleyan minister, and she had only become a member of our church at her marriage, and

even now preferred her old tenets. Lydia had nothing in common with her, and never entered into religious discussions. She would listen patiently to all her mother said. She did not agree, but she refrained from contradicting, and bore even slander in meek submission. Many a time had she poured her sorrows into the willing ear of her kind pastor, Mr. Montague; had received his consolations and blessing, and had returned to her daily struggles with renewed resolution and faith. Lydia was always ready at her mother's call; would throw down her own book in an instant, however interested she might be, and would take up a sermon and read aloud to her mother, with the greatest apparent pleasure, although the doctrine it taught might be quite contrary to her views. This very readiness to do her bidding, was apt to irritate Mrs. Carpenter, and many a sneer and bitter word Lydia received for her unhesitating submission.

She had, too, another self-imposed duty, but this was less harassing, less foreign to her nature. She was fully aware how uncongenial a home like theirs was to a young man; she feared for her brother, and her constant study was how to amuse and keep him content with the meagre entertainment their home life afforded. She learnt chess, that she might play with him in the evenings; would even allow herself to be beaten, that he might not be vexed at her repeated successes; and would listen patiently to his tales of college, and what he had done, or intended to do. She tried to influence him, and to lead him to a more profitable use of his time, but here she utterly failed. Her brother was reserved, and never communicated his opinions; and, indeed, it is doubtful if he had any. Lydia was greatly attached to him,

and being by many years his senior, she had watched him grow up, with a firm hope he would one day prove a zealous minister of the Church of England; she mistook the silence of stupidity for a serious turn of mind, but his college life had opened her eyes to his real character, and now, even if he had desired to take holy orders, she would have dissuaded him from it. Being of so active a nature herself, she could scarcely imagine a love of idleness such as he professed, and she therefore eagerly caught at and encouraged anything that seemed to interest him. She saved up her scanty allowance, that she might belong to the lending library in the town, not so much for herself, for she had but little time to read, but for her brother. She encouraged him to walk with her, and delighted in the interest which he showed for the schools, believing that interest to arise from far different motives than the real ones.

Lydia never thought it strange that he should like to take messages for her to Miss Smith, when he would refuse to go anywhere else, or stir a finger to oblige her in a general way. Wholly unselfish herself, she did not believe that others could be so, and was, as it were, blinded by her own goodness.

“ I knew your cold was very bad, and it would do you harm to go out this morning, as it is damp, so I have come to tell you I will go to Mr. Montague with the monthly reports, if you will give them to me, Miss Smith,” said Lydia, on the day after the ball, as she entered the schoolmistress’s little sitting-room.

“ How very good of you, my dear Miss Carpenter ! to think that you should come all through the fog to do me a service ! I am so much obliged,

you are always ready to help me, how can I ever thank you enough?"

"Do not mention that, but shut the door; you ought not to breathe this atmosphere with your cough."

"I must tell you how deeply I feel your goodness, Miss Carpenter, and how ill I repay it."

Lydia was about to interrupt her again, but she continued, hurriedly—"Nay, let me speak in justice to myself; I have long wished to express my gratitude to you, but could not find words; indeed you overwhelm me with your daily kindness; may you never have cause to look down upon me as unworthy of your favours."

"Miss Smith, pray....." said Lydia, but she was interrupted before she could utter another word.

"Listen, and bear with me once for all; I will never distress you in this way again, but now I must speak. I had determined to do so as soon as possible, and your additional goodness this morning has increased that determination. Miss Carpenter, little as you are aware of it, you are heaping coals of fire on my head; desist from your acts of kindness to me, each fresh one tears my heart with remorse; I am not what I seem, I have deceived you bitterly, and yet cannot tell you how. I am bound in honour to keep the secret, though you know not what it costs me to do so. Did not the disclosure of it affect another, I should long ago have betrayed all; as it is, however, duty bids me be silent, and I am so even to you whom I wrong."

Tears stood in the poor woman's eyes as she said this, and she paused to recover her composure. Lydia no longer attempted to interrupt her, she

stood bewildered, and scarcely understood what she heard.

“Yes, I wrong you now, but shall wrong you deeper yet,” continued Miss Smith. “Do not look at me with those pitying eyes, they convict me, and I tremble before you as I should before an angel of goodness. I came here lonely—I had no one to speak to, or ask for consolation and advice; you saw this, you compassionated my forlorn position, you offered to be my friend, and have proved yourself a true one, whilst I—although I too promised—how have I acted? Ask me not, and if ever my dread secret is disclosed, look at me with those eyes of pity, but let not their expression be reproachful. I could not bear that, although I deserve all—even your hate.” Again she paused, the excitement of speaking was too much for her, and she fell into a chair weeping as if her heart would break.

“Compose yourself,” cried Lydia, throwing herself on her knees beside her; she was ever ready to console, and although she could not enter into the feelings of wild self-reproach, still the tears of bitter sorrow ever found an echo of pity in her heart. It was her province, her right to offer consolation, and, like the true sister of mercy, she loved to soothe the aching heart, and to see the bright smile of hope replace the agony of despair. We will not repeat all Lydia said, or how she raised, at length, the downcast head, and spoke of hope, amendment, and blessing.

“But,” cried Miss Smith, looking timidly at her, “if I prove too weak to choose the path of duty? If I still continue blindly in the same course, not believing it wholly wrong? If I am tempted above my strength and fall deeper than I

have yet done? If I wrong you bitterly after all this.....”

“Then,” said Lydia, rising, and her countenance lighted up with benevolence, “may God forgive you, for it will be sin against Him, and may He give me strength to forgive you from my heart whatever wrong you meditate against me.” She had scarcely pronounced these words when the front door opened without any previous warning, and her brother stood before them. With a scream of terror, Miss Smith threw herself back in her chair, and gazed at the intruder as if he had come to convict her and disclose all; but there he stood motionless, with his hand on the door, irresolute what to do. Like a flash of lightning the truth burst upon Lydia.

“Yes, it must be so, they are privately married; a disgrace has fallen on our family. My poor father, what will he say?”

No one spoke for some minutes: at length, with an effort to look perfectly unconcerned, the intruder said, with many apologies for his abrupt entrance, that he had brought Miss Smith a note from the Rectory, and he produced one which he quietly placed in her hands.

“I will not detain you longer, now that I have performed my errand, as I see this conference has been strictly private, and my appearance was not altogether wished for or expected.” He glanced at Miss Smith.

“Indeed,” said she, rising hurriedly, “you mistake; any relation of Miss Carpenter’s is welcome to me. We were speaking of private concerns, it is true, and your sudden apparition discomposed me.”

Mr. Carpenter bowed and left the house. Lydia

did not attempt to detain him, but he had no sooner disappeared than she approached Miss Smith, who stood by the table nervously turning over some papers, and laying her hand lightly on her arm, she said, "What does this mean?"

"Mean!" ejaculated the other, as if startled. "How am I to tell you? I cannot imagine to what you allude."

Lydia looked greatly distressed. "I allude to my brother's sudden appearance and your consequent discomfiture. Is he in the habit of coming here at all times?"

"He often brings me messages from you," said the other pointedly, and her words went like a sword through Lydia's heart.

"Tell me all," said she, hurriedly. "I have seen enough to arouse my fears. Tell me if it is through my brother that you will wrong me?"

Miss Smith laughed a hoarse hysterical laugh, but answered nothing.

"Your manner confirms my worst fears. Justify yourself, Miss Smith, and, if possible, exculpate him, for he is my brother."

"I know it," was the cold reply, "and one day he will be my husband."

"Will be!" cried Lydia, clasping her hands. "Thank heaven, it may yet be all set right. You have not, then, married without our knowledge? What you intended to do I will not ask."

There was a change in Miss Smith's manner as she heard these words. She had expected a torrent of reproaches,—a threat of vengeance; but she had mistaken Lydia's character, and, turning to her with an expression of mixed hope and pain, she seized her hand, exclaiming, "Forgive me!"

"Yes," was the whispered answer, "and may you never know the want of a friend."

"Heaven bless you, and forgive me," sobbed the poor woman.

Lydia said nothing for some minutes, but let this fresh burst of feeling subside before she continued, then, leading her to a seat, she said in a kind tone—

"The fault is not yet committed, and, therefore, can be prevented. I will speak to my brother upon the subject; you must do so likewise. Urge him to the necessity of going to my father, and of speaking openly to him. He is not a hard man. He may give his consent, and, if he does, knowing that it is for my brother's happiness, I will receive you as a sister; but oh, remember, do not let this commencement of your married life foreshadow what is to follow—deceit and concealment ruin peace; you have deceived me, I can forgive that, but let me not have to forgive deceit practised against my father."

Lydia rose, her manner was kind and yet decisive. Miss Smith felt her superiority—felt her conduct had deserved any censure, and she was grateful to Lydia for treating her so kindly.

"Bring me the reports, I will take them to Mr. Montague as I promised. The fog is getting worse instead of better."

Miss Smith brought them and they parted.

It was with a sorrowful heart that Lydia knocked at her brother's door on her return home. She had had time to consider all the circumstances during her walk, and she saw how deeply she had been deceived, and that too by the brother for whom she had so often sacrificed her own pleasure. "Come in," cried a voice from within. Lydia opened the

door, her brother stood by the window with his hands behind him. He turned partly round as she entered, saying—

“Well, Lid, what is the matter?”

“I want to speak a few words with you, Arthur, upon a very serious subject, and one which is extremely distressing to me. May I do so now?”

“A preachment, eh, Lid? I can stand a quarter of an hour, but no more—here,” added he, taking out his watch, “I will time you. It is just half-past twelve, at a quarter to one I must light my pipe.”

“Will you do me a great favour, dear Arthur?”

“Let me hear it first.”

“It is not a difficult one. I only ask you to hear me seriously to the end of what I have to say.”

“For a whole quarter of an hour I promise I will; so now, Lid, behold me ready, and make the best use of the time you can.” He spoke in a hurried, joking manner, as if he half feared what was to follow. Lydia looked sorrowfully at him, but there was nothing reproachful in the tone with which she pronounced the following words:—

“Arthur, I have discovered your secret.” He moved uneasily in his chair but remained silent. and Lydia continued—“Your sudden appearance at the schools this morning, and Miss Smith’s alarm lest you should have overheard our conversation, made me guess it. A thousand incidents passed over by me as meaningless, came rushing into my head. I feared the worst, and when you were gone I wormed the truth from her.”

“And you come to congratulate me, I suppose,” said the young man, looking away from her.

“I come to ask you what you mean. I know

of your engagement. Are you trifling with her feelings?"

"Trifling! what a question! Do you call marriage trifling?"

"Far from it; but can you marry her? Think for one moment, Arthur; you are penniless, she is so likewise; beggary stares you in the face."

"I have two hands and a head," said he, scornfully.

"But do you like using them? Would you work without ceasing from morning till night, and feel happy in denying yourself to please her?"

Lydia waited, but received no answer; he only bit his nails and muttered something about her being "a bore."

"Then there is another objection—an insurmountable one, Arthur."

"What is that?" asked he, turning and looking at her.

"Our father."

"Pooh! why should he object? Besides, I am of age, and can take care of myself."

"He will not give his consent to such a marriage. You know his opinions on this point as well as I."

"What can he say against her? She is as well educated as you are, and, above all, you are such *dear friends*."

"Her rank is beneath us."

"And pray did not our father marry beneath him?"

"Yes," said Lydia, softly; "and for that reason he is more particular with regard to us."

"Oh! you think he finds the ill effects of it, do you?"

“Hush, Arthur, you know what I mean.”

“Well, Lid, have you had your say? the time is nearly up.”

“Have I made you think about the step you are about to take?” she said, laying her hand on his arm. “Do not let love blind you. Think of the future—of your family, and pause.”

“You asked me if I meant to marry her,” said he, smiling bitterly; “and no sooner did I say I did, than you begin by dissuading me from it. I wonder who is trifling with another’s feelings now?”

“God knows I mean well,” said Lydia, with difficulty restraining her tears. “I wish to save both from unhappiness, and all I ask of you is, do nothing rashly. Go to my father, consult with him, open your whole heart, ask his forgiveness and consent, do not let concealment and deceit throw a blot on your character; if you blush to declare your love now, what will it be when you introduce your wife?”

“Blush! Did you ever see me blush, Lid?” asked he, impertinently.

“Then why not confess at once? Go now, whilst our father is at home, he is in the library alone.”

“I am not such a fool as you take me for, Lid. I know what would follow; and let me give you a little advice; don’t put your nose into other people’s affairs, you may, one day, get the worst of it.”

“But your concerns are mine, Arthur. You are my brother; what distresses you must needs touch me. Let me help you, let me talk to you; perhaps one day you may feel the want of a sister.”

“Do you wish to help me, Lid? if so, keep my

secret, and never breathe a word of what has passed this morning."

Lydia rose, looked at him fixedly, and then said, "I cannot promise. I will always help you for your good; but, were I to promise this, I should wrong myself, my father, and you."

"Well, do as you like, I am indifferent. I take my own way, you take yours; it is all the same to me. Time is up, think about it, and prepare to receive a sister-in-law. Good by."

"Oh, Arthur!" said Lydia reproachfully, and had he seen the look of deep distress upon her face he must have stopped, for it would have melted a heart of stone; but he had gone without even turning to look at her.

Lydia stood on the spot where he had left her for some time, irresolute as to what she ought to do. Duty seemed to whisper, Go to your father and tell all;—affection, You may mar your brother's happiness—forbear. She listened to the latter, and instead of going to her father, turned her steps towards her own room, and eased her conscience by writing to Miss Smith, to whom she felt sure her brother had gone. Her letter ran thus:—

"I have seen Arthur. Our interview has been unsatisfactory; he refuses to ask his father's consent; urge him to do this—your influence may suffice, though mine has failed. Think of the misery deceit, quarrels, and misunderstandings bring on a family; assert your rights; let your own pride dictate for you, and do not suffer yourself to be forced into a family who will not own you, though you may become a member of it by marriage. There is time yet to rectify any error that has been committed; do so; act rightly and

justly by all. Heaven will bless you if you do this. You have the prayers of a weak though loving sister, and believe that my wish is for the happiness of both brother and friend.

“Yours,

“LYDIA CARPENTER.”

She read the letter over and over again, put in stops, and scratched them out, then folding it up she sealed it and left the room to consign it to safe hands, which would be sure to deliver it without delay. The messenger was absent some time, and it was not till about three in the afternoon that a letter was placed in her hands; she broke open the envelope, and read the contents with dismay.

CHAPTER XIII.

OUT DREDGING.

ARMED with pocket-lens, bottles, tin pans, surface-net, and dredge, Captain Macklaren started on his proposed excursion early the following morning in company with some sailors, whose boat he had engaged, as being the most commodious and best suited to his purpose. We have already been introduced to the principal man, for he is none other than the sailor who so bravely rescued Maud and her companions from their uncomfortable, if not perilous situation. Jack Catton was a fine robust seaman, accustomed to face dangers and difficulties, and utterly indifferent to outward circumstances; he was, in short, a regular British tar, thoroughly brave, good-natured, and independent.

There is something inexpressibly soothing in the motion of a small boat when, lifted lightly by each wave, it rises and falls but to rise again. The sea-breeze comes softly over the ocean, and fans your cheek, whispering soft sighs into your ear, and filling your head with dreams. Cares and troubles fly away, whilst every feeling, even that of individuality, is drowned in the ecstacy of listening to the moan of the sea, the plash of the

oars, and the cry of the seagulls as they float near you, and then, affrighted, fly away.

Captain Macklaren was not a dreamer, nor was he altogether poetical; he loved to examine into the marvellous works of nature, but it was curiosity and love of discovery that influenced him, rather than admiration for the beautiful, and a fondness for contemplation. He enjoyed the feeling of freedom the ocean cannot fail to inspire, but he did not give way to the dreams or to the ecstasy of which we have just spoken; he heard the whisperings of the wind, the moan of the sea, and the cry of the birds, but he was thinking of the dredge, and was busily engaged in preparing it, so that when a convenient spot should be chosen all should be in readiness.

At length the time for action arrived, and the dredge was thrown down in nine fathoms; some moments of suspense followed; all eyes were watching for it, and none more anxiously than those of Captain Macklaren. Up it came with its prisoners—they were in the boat. What have we secured? Let us see—here is a specimen of the swimming crab, a number of the common shrimp, a two-spotted sucking-fish, besides many others of more or less note. A few minutes have scarcely elapsed before they are all transferred to the tin pans, and some few to the bottles. Expressions of “Beautiful!” “The thing I was looking for!” “Exquisite! I must examine that by and by,” escaped Captain Macklaren’s lips. The sailors looked on amused—they did not understand his admiration for the “little varminths.” They followed his instructions to the letter, and kept up a running joke about their present employment in an undertone amongst themselves, which seemed to

form a topic of never-ending entertainment to them all.

Captain Macklaren was very fond of the whole race of sailors, and felt more especially interested in the hardy fishermen of Brimelsea; he understood their manners, was a great favourite with them, and knew well how to elicit from them stories of their own adventures, or what they had witnessed. He liked to listen to their yarns, and during the leisure intervals that morning he entered into conversation with them, and led them on to many a tale of wonder. Jack Catton was often engaged as pilot; he had seen more rough weather than most of them, had been on board many a foreign vessel, and had many a curious story to tell of the manners and customs of the different nations he had met with during his career, which made him quite the hero of the beer drinking, smoking parties at the Royal Duke, the favourite resort of all the fishermen. A sailor's life is spent in the two extremes—of hard work and utter idleness.

The fishermen of Brimelsea spent their “shore days” in gossiping at the corners of streets, in knots of four and five, watching the vessels on the offing, speculating as to what and who they were, and making, no doubt, very sage remarks about rigging, &c. The Royal Duke is the rendezvous in the evenings where adventures are talked over, amid the fumes of tobacco, for, alas! there are not many who find their homes sufficiently interesting to retain them for more than an hour at a time. Accustomed to excitement, they find domestic life monotonous; it is necessary to them, and they seek it as they would their daily food. Hence it is that the dissenting chapels are densely

thronged by sailors, whilst the churches are almost deserted by them ; they find the hysterical tears of the ranter more attractive than the truths of the Church of England, delivered by its clergy in a more sedate, and, to them, unimpressive manner. They look for excitement in their devotions as they do in everything else, and find, as they will tell you, "more good" in sitting under a ranter, whose rough eloquence they can understand.

"What sort of a winter had you, Jack?" asked Captain Macklaren, as he leaned against the side of the boat, and folded his arms across his chest.

"Pretty fair, on the whole ; we had a few gales, it is true, but there was not much mischief done considering—some small craft got stranded, and a Dutchman went to pieces on the rocks ; that was the worst job, but we saved most of the poor beggars. Those Dutchmen arn't good for much, they are chicken-hearted fellows when it comes to the push. There were some Frooes on board, and I'm blessed if the rascals weren't going to leave 'em behind ; they said their lives were worth as much as the Frooes, and they didn't care if they went to the bottom ; but we weren't going to stand that sort of nonsense, and we got 'em a-board of us somehow, though it was a dirty night. Poor creatures ! There was one o' the women a fainting with the cold ; I had my great coat on, and though it was all I had to keep me dry, I put it on her, in spite of the man who was, I think, her husband. He would have let her die just where she was, without raising a hand to help her. Shame on 'em ! but those foreigners are shabby rascals, not worth their salt, as I have often said afore. You should see 'em eating, sir. Oh, it is enough to make a cat sick ! Why, though I'm a rough sort of a

chap, I like to do things neatly, and not make myself into a pig, that knows no better than to put his snout into the victuals. Bless you, sir, they think nothing of it; I've seen 'em pretty near all fours in the tub o' soup."

"Who, what, the pigs?" asked Macklaren, laughing.

"The pigs! no, they're gentlemen in compar'son—I means the foreigneers, sir—the dirty varlets! and they never says a grace over their meals, like good Christians."

"Are you a churchman, Jack?"

"Oh, no, sir, we don't like church. Mr. Pipkin is a very good man, I'll say that for him, but he doesn't understand the art o' preaching like Mr. Stamper o' the Wesleyan Meeting—he's the man, sir—I've seen him so affecting, sir, that he's used two or three hankershes one arter the t'other."

"Why did not you offer him a sponge, my man? that would have been much the most effectual. Handkerchiefs are not worth twopence on such occasions."

"You're right there, sir. I'm not overgiven to piping my eye; but you might have wrung my red flag out arter that sermon, and I'll bet you any money you'd have got half a pint of tears out o' it!"

A general titter greeted this announcement, and Jack looked supremely contemptuous.

"You don't believe me! Well, all I has to say is, come and sit under Mr. Stamper next Sunday; you have all the week to think about it, for this is only Wednesday, and I'll promise you, you can't make up your minds better than to decide to come."

"All right, Jack," said Captain Macklaren,

“I’ll subscribe a shilling towards the sponge, and if you find a little baccy more tempting before next Sunday comes, I’ll be the last man to quarrel with you for spending it in that way.” He put a shilling into his hand; Jack looked at it, turned it over, and finally caused it to disappear in a capacious pocket, with a nod of the head, and a sincere “Thank you, sir.”

On turning a projecting line of rocks which had hid the town of Brimelsea from their view, they came in full sight of the town and harbour. The sea-shore was studded with people bustling about like a swarm of flies in the bright sunshine, and they could distinctly see carriages driving up and down the parade. Captain Macklaren’s eyes rested involuntarily upon the gold letters that proclaimed the position of the Boarding House, and a shade of sentimentality crossed his face. What could he be thinking of? surely not of Miss Massing. Just then a thick smoke was seen to rise from the harbour, and the exclamations of the sailors made him look in that direction.

“What does it mean?” he asked, carelessly.

“I expect it is the new yacht that came into port the other day, it belongs to a Lord Somebody, and is called the ‘Firefly;’ we shall soon see, for it will be out directly. One of the crew told me they were under orders for a trip on Tuesday, but I suppose the fog prevented ’em getting out, and they are going to-day instead.”

Captain Macklaren’s curiosity was raised; he thought of his friend Holford, and watched anxiously for the vessel to appear. It was some time, however, before it did, as there had evidently been some difficulty in getting clear of the other vessels stationed in the harbour; but at length a puff of

smoke blacker than the rest, was seen, the water was agitated, and the "Firefly" shot out like a swan upon the cresting waves.

"Bravo!" shouted Jack; "she's the prettiest screw I've had the pleasure o' seeing."

"Is that Lord Reynoldforde's yacht?" asked Captain Macklaren.

"To be sure it is, and a good sum o' money she must have cost. Is it possible you have not been down to see her, sir? there has been such a crowd on the pier just above where she lay, that it was no such easy work getting along; all Brimelsea turned out to see her steam into the harbour, I wonder you didn't follow the crowd."

"There is a friend of mine on board her now," said Captain Macklaren. "He wanted me to go out with them, but I had other fish to fry, or rather zoophytes to catch, and so you see I did not go. What sort of a crew has she? Do you know the captain?"

"No, they are all strangers in these parts; but we shall soon find out how much they're worth, that is to say, if milord doesn't tire of cruising about the coast. I am told he is a fidgetty piece o' goods, and only half English; he has a little French jackanapes with him, and they do nothing but jabber together in their unknown tongue. The captain doesn't like it, they say, and it's very right he shouldn't. There's one good trait in milord's character, sir, and just harkee to what it is: he understands liberality, all the men say that o' him. There is no stinting, nor nonsense o' that sort, plenty o' grog on board," and Jack looked very knowing, as he put his finger to his nose.

"How did you find all this out, my man?" asked Captain Macklaren, smiling.

Jack winked his eye, as he answered, "We know how to get at the truth o' things; we don't stand with our hands afore us for nothing, I can tell you, sir."

"Do you know if there are any ladies on board?"

"Jem saw two on 'em this morning," remarked a sailor from the background. "One was a young 'un."

"And the other?" asked Captain Macklaren.

"Jem didn't say what age she wore, but I think he said she spoke a furren tongue."

"Is the vessel old or new?" demanded he, again addressing Jack.

"Bran new, sir, not a speck about her, all paint and gilt; and as to the saloon, why, it's just fit for the queen, and no less a person. There's cheers and sofys enough to make your back ache to think about; no one need sit upright in that little gem yonder, a-smoking and a-steaming. Why, just look where she is now, sir, she'll be out o' sight before I can raise my little finger. I should just like to be mate on board her."

"There are many more improbable things than that Jack."

"I should like to think so, sir. I can see myself now as proud o' that yacht as a mother o' her first babby. How she cuts the water and dashes the waves on either side—it's fust rate! if you get acquainted with the master o' her, you'll not forget to put a good word in for Jack Catton, will ye, sir?"

"You may depend on me, if any opportunity should occur; but you will not have so much liberty as you have now, and I doubt the pay being as good."

"May be not, sir, but then it's regular, and that's a great thing for us poor fellows."

“Here is an opportunity for a haul,” said Captain Macklaren, who, although he had entered eagerly into the conversation, had not forgotten the great object of the expedition. “Over with the dredge, my men, we shall have a good one this time, I hope.”

Some moments of expectation—no one spoke, then up came the dredge with its specimens for examination. There were sea cucumbers, stars, and urchins, to say nothing of innumerable shrimps and prawns. Captain Macklaren selected the most valuable, whilst the rest were consigned to their watery home again, without undergoing any further inconvenience, and as he placed the various specimens in the jars prepared for them, he thought—

“Miss Erving will be pleased to find I have been so successful. My mother must ask her to come over to us with her aunt this evening, that we may examine them together.”

CHAPTER XIV.

DISTRESS.

LYDIA'S eyes ran eagerly over the letter that had been placed in her hands, then letting it fall on the ground, she sat for some moments as if stupefied; everything reeled before her; she scarcely understood what she had read; fancied she had been mistaken, and stooping down, she picked up the letter, and prepared to peruse it once more. Let us peep over her shoulder, and like evil sprites read the secrets of others. The letter ran thus:—

“DEAR LID—Your effusion to Alice has caused me much amusement, a most sisterly interference, expressing sentiments worthy of a parson, but pray let me urge you for the future to forbear; you know well what ‘misery deceit, quarrels, and misunderstandings bring on a family.’ Do not be instrumental in raising discord between man and wife; you have always shown yourself a well-meaning girl; do not give me cause to withdraw my opinion of you, and for the years yet to come, add a little more discretion to your catalogue of virtues.

“Finding by your conduct this morning that

you were determined to make matters public at once, I have taken the liberty to be a little beforehand with you, and long ere this letter reaches you, I and dearest Alice will be on our way to London. When next we meet, I trust we shall be better friends. You have my full permission to inform all your acquaintances, from the governor down to the charming Miss Erving, for whom you have struck up such a rapid and truly romantic attachment.

“Alice is getting very impatient; she says we shall be too late for the express. I shall probably come to Brimelsea in about a year; if you have anything to say to me, you may write an advertisement in the *Times*. I shall be sure to see it, only you must cut the preachment short, as those kind of sermons come very expensive, and that would be a pity. Give my love to the elders, your sister-in-law sends her’s to you. By Jove, you showed your taste, when you chose Alice for one of your friends. She’s the right sort of girl, plenty of go in her, and no nonsense. If it had not been for her society, Brimelsea would have been too dull to hold me.

“Good by, Lid, and may you make as good a marriage as I have. It is impossible to wish you better luck.

“Ever your attached brother,

“ARTHUR.”

Lydia held the letter before her in mute astonishment. Was this the brother whom she had sacrificed herself to please? Was this the Arthur whom she had fondly hoped would one day become a clergyman? Alas! yes, he had deceived her, trifled with her, and now abused her, yet she felt

no resentment towards him, only deep commiseration, for she felt sure he would live to repent the step he had taken. She saw a life of disappointment stretching out into the dim land of future, no happy old age to look forward to, his children growing up penniless, his wife cross, her beauty gone, her temper soured. Lydia saw all this through the mist of tears that veiled her eyes, and letting her aching head drop on her hand, she wept bitterly. It was her first great sorrow.

Something was to be done, however; the news must be broken to her father, and this was the hardest task Lydia had to perform. She dried her eyes, smoothed her hair, looked in the glass without really seeing herself, and walked towards the door, vainly turning over in her own mind how best to open the subject to her father. She thought of reading the letter aloud to him; then the remembrance of some few passages occurred to her, which would enrage him perhaps even more against her brother, and she immediately abandoned the idea. Three times did she approach the door, and three times turn back into the room; she battled with her natural timidity, reasoned with herself, and finally starting from the chair into which she had sunk, she forced herself to act, and left the room without having in the least degree arranged into words the painful announcement she was about to make. Her hand trembled as she tapped at her father's door, and asked if he were at liberty, and could speak with her on a most important matter.

"Important, eh?" said he. "Oh! yes, come in, let us have it all out; a charity falling to the ground for want of funds, I suppose."

"No, father, something much nearer home."

Her voice trembled, and tears rolled unbidden down her pale cheeks ; she threw herself at his feet, exclaiming, between her sobs, “ Arthur has wronged us all, he is married, has fled from Brimelsea ; burning shame brings these tears to my eyes ; I was blind to what I might have seen ; but, oh ! father, forgive us both.”

“ Rise, girl, rise, explain yourself ; let us have no theatrical scenes ; I hate tears and crying—such nonsense, what does it all mean ?”

Lydia rose, and with a powerful effort suppressed her feelings, and related all that had passed, in tones as calm as she could command.

“ Confound the fellow ! my curses alight.....” broke forth the enraged father ; but Lydia put her hand upon his mouth, saying, softly—

“ Forgiveness is sweet, and heaps coals of fire on the head of those who are in error ; forgive him, father, he will have to endure misery enough.”

“ Forgive ?—the scoundrel !—he deserves my anger ; and you, Lydia, with your charity and schools, I forbid you ever to enter that cursed place again. You have brought all this upon us. Had not you made friends with that woman, they would never have met. Teaching, education, stuff and nonsense ; pretty moral lessons the children must learn there. Pray, is the morning lecture on disobeying parents, and the evening on doing your duty to your neighbour ? Ha, ha ! leave me to teach the young ideas ; and if ever you put your head into that place again, I’ll turn you out of doors, by heavens I will !”

“ We have no brother now,” said Lydia, softly, her head somewhat bent.

“ And it is a good thing we have not. You will be running off next, I suppose ; and, by the

rule of contrary, with a dancing-master, or fiddler, or.....”

“ Father, hear me—compose yourself—and I will explain all.”

“ Compose myself—explain all ? Why, you have explained enough, in all conscience. There are no more runnings away to be confessed, I suppose. Why did not you tell me this before ? Why didn’t you give me time to catch the fellow ? Why, I say, why, Lydia ?”

“ Because I could not, father ; I did not know it myself.”

“ Did not know ? See them walking together, talking and laughing, yet still not know. Do not crown all with falsehoods, Lydia. I do not believe that, so you may spare your breath, and, above all, your truthfulness.”

“ Father, I repeat what I said before, I did not know. I cannot blame myself for concealing anything from you, for I have concealed nothing ; but long will the memory of my own blindness haunt me, when I see my brother’s sorrow, when I see your anger ; and my life-long endeavour will be to unite you once more, and thus to expiate my fault. Forgive me for this blindness. Could you but see how my heart bleeds, you would not add to its agony. Forgive me, and forgive him.”

Lydia looked up beseechingly into her father’s face, but he frowned at her ; he was too angry to listen to her, and waving his hand, he said, crossly—

“ Begone, your prattle irritates me, I cannot contain myself ; begone, and tell your mother to come here.”

Lydia walked towards the door, seeing that it was useless for her to speak then ; but she had

hardly reached it, when her father called on her to stop—she turned round immediately.

“Where is that letter you said you had received?”

“I left it in my bed-room.”

“Bring it to me, I must read it.”

“I cannot, father: it was written in a moment of passion; it is unworthy of Arthur; he wrongs himself. I am about to commit it to the flames.”

“Bring the letter to me.”

Lydia left the room, went straight to her own, took up the letter that was lying on the table, ran her eye over it once again, and with an expression of disgust she tore it in a thousand pieces. It was the first time she had ever disobeyed her father, and now she did it for her brother's sake.

Maud sat by the window in Miss Massing's sitting-room that morning, scarcely expecting Blanche's promised visit, as the weather was so bad, and she was therefore agreeably surprised when the door opened, and Miss Farncourt was announced.

“This is, indeed, good of you, Blanche,” she exclaimed, springing across the room to meet her. “I quite gave you up when I saw the fog.”

“A very friendly action on the part of a friend, but you see I behaved better, and did not give you up.”

“You must be very wet, Blanche. Let me take your cloak off.”

Maud would have done so immediately, had not her friend prevented her by saying—

“No, thank you, I do not mind a little wet. I

have enjoyed my walk very much ; and to tell the truth, I enjoy a fog. I like the mystery of it. I like to conjure up all kinds of scenes and faces in the dim distance, and imagine to myself that it hides the visions of my future ; and if only I could raise the veil, I should see it all lying plainly before me. Then I look steadfastly into the mist and fancy I see figures moving and acting in it as they do on the stage ; but I see you are setting me down as mad, so I will say no more ; you do not understand my feeling of curiosity as regards the future. I have it very strongly, so you see it makes me romance a little. Do you believe in characters foretelling fate ?”

“ I confess I do not quite understand what you mean, Blanche,” replied Maud, smiling.

“ Well, perhaps I am rather confused in the way I describe things. I jump from one topic to another, without much consideration for those who have to listen ; but what I meant to say is, that I believe a person’s future life may, in a great degree, be foretold by their character. We form our fates in a great measure. Half the misfortunes that fall upon people are their own doing, and therefore if we can form a correct judgment of a person’s character, I think we might all turn truthful prophets. Now, as regards you, I firmly believe you will have a quiet, comfortable life. You will have few trials, and they will touch you lightly. But as to myself, I foresee all kinds of difficulties ; everything going wrong, and plenty of sorrow. I see you are staring at me in astonishment, but what do you say to my theory ?”

“ I was wondering who had put it into your head,” replied Maud, “ and am half inclined to lay it to the Marquis’s charge.”

Blanche frowned as she said, hurriedly—

“Do not mention him; I cannot bear even the sound of his name; and, as you may well imagine, I am tired of the sight of him.”

“Yet I saw you dancing a great many times with the Marquis last night.”

“Oh! he dances very well, but you would pity me for always having him at my elbow, if you knew what a stupid, horrid man he is. Perhaps one day you will know, and that too well.”

Blanche sighed slightly, but quickly recovering herself, she added—

“By the by, do you know who a certain gentleman of the name of Holford is, Maud?”

“I have heard of him. He is a great friend of Captain Macklaren. I was introduced to him last night, but the dance I was engaged to him for never arrived.”

“Oh!” ejaculated the other, dreamily, “then I suppose he is a good sort of young man.”

“Yes, certainly; what makes you ask?”

“Nothing farther than I was curious to know, as he seems determined to give us a great deal of his society. The breakfast had scarcely been cleared away, when he was announced this morning. I believe papa had asked him to go out yachting, but he never could have thought we should venture out on such a foggy day.”

“He was very much struck with you at the ball, Blanche, so I suppose he intends to do his best to make an equally good impression on you,” said Maud, laughing.

“Extremely kind of him; but pray, if you find a fitting opportunity, tell his friend he may spare his pains. Papa has asked him to come to us to-

morrow, and they are all three walking on the parade now. I am afraid papa likes him."

"Oh! for shame, Blanche. Every one says he is a nice young man."

"I hate nice young men," replied her friend, "and above all, admirers; they never give one any peace. I was bored to death in London, and did hope to get a little peace here, then up pops this Mr. Holford; but depend upon it I will do my very best to make him pop down again."

"You had better marry in self-defence."

"Marry!" exclaimed Blanche. "No, Maud, I have seen enough of that, but doubtless I shall be caught some day," and she yawned wearily. "You and I always agreed to be old maids when we were at school, but from what I have seen, I am afraid you are beginning to change your mind already."

"Well, I still think that in many cases it is the happiest, but....."

"But what? I am all impatience to hear the end of your sentence. Are you engaged?" asked Blanche.

"No, you silly girl, nothing of that sort. I was merely going to say one might alter one's opinion under certain circumstances."

Blanche laughed—"We are getting very sentimental this morning, and are talking more nonsense than usual; but I am quite sure of one thing, that if ever I do marry, it will be because I am obliged."

"You strange girl, what could possibly oblige you to take a husband?"

"There are many circumstances under which I should consider myself obliged to do so, but I earnestly hope none of them will ever occur."

"I really believe you are very hard-hearted,

Blanche," said Maud. " You can see unfortunate young men desperately in love with you, and do not even pity them. I shall call you my stony-hearted friend."

" You are right, I am happy to say, though my heart is not stony towards my friends," and she threw her arm round Maud's waist, who kissed her as she whispered—

" And none know that better than I, dear Blanche."

" Oh, ho !" ejaculated a voice from behind, which made them both start up and look round. Miss Massing had entered the apartment from her bedroom, and now stood close beside them. Blanche looked somewhat amazed at the sudden apparition, but Maud introduced her, laughingly, to her aunt, and they were soon engaged in a lively conversation.

" Are you the only occupants of the Boarding House?" asked Blanche.

" Oh, no, there are a great many besides ourselves ; but this is my aunt's private sitting-room."

" Would it be etiquette for me to look over the house? I have a great curiosity to see what the arrangements are like. Where do you sit in the evening?"

" All together in the common sitting-room," replied Maud. " May we go down there now, aunt?"

" Certainly ; I will introduce Miss Farncourt."

" If you think it would be more polite," said Blanche, " I shall have no objections to tell the lady of the house that one of my maiden friends is thinking of residing at Brimelsea, and wished to know all the particulars about this boarding establishment."

“Miss Briggs is a very nice person, and will be delighted, I am sure, to show you anything without such excuses,” said Miss Massing, rather primly. “If you are ready now we will go down to the drawing-room.”

“I hope a good many of the old ladies will be at home,” whispered Blanche to Maud. “I want particularly to see them.”

Count Porskinski was engaged in a game of chess with Miss Bridges as our party entered the room, and, although the game was in the most critical part, he rose up directly, and, much to his antagonist’s disgust, went to meet Maud, who was about to seat herself in the window with her friend.

“You are not tired, I hope, with all your last night’s exertions,” said he, in German. Maud replied in the negative, and he leaned against the wall beside her.

“Mademoiselle Lafoure comes at three o’clock,” said Blanche. “You promised to go with me to the station. Have you changed your mind, Maud, now that the day has turned out so badly?”

“No; I should very much like to meet her, to say nothing of the pleasure of a walk with you. It is only two o’clock; an hour may make a great deal of difference in the weather. The sky looks brighter towards the west even now.”

“Oh, we shall have a fine evening,” remarked the Count, anxious to put in his word; “the band is to play on the pier, and, if Miss Erving will grace the parade with her presence, I will do my best to ingratiate myself with the band-master, and get him to play all her favourite airs.”

“Talking about favourite airs,” said Blanche, “I should be so much obliged to you, Maud, if

you would sing me that lovely little ballad you used to soothe me to sleep with sometimes on the half-holidays at school."

Maud turned and looked at her. "What, here?" said she, in some surprise.

"Yes, now; I feel in the humour for it."

"If you really wish it, I shall be most happy," said Maud, still hesitating. A look from her friend was sufficient to show the wish was sincere, and without hearing the Count's, "Oh, do, pray!" Maud went to the piano, whither the others followed her. The air she sang was very plaintive; the words were English, and spoke of the dreams of youth, of parting, and the hope of a long reunion beyond the grave. Maud's voice was peculiarly adapted to mournful ballads; she felt the sentiment the author wished to inspire, and her feeling was communicated to those who listened to her. Blanche stood silently behind her, enjoying each note, and anxiously catching every word that fell from her friend's lips; they offered balm to her spirit, even though they pained her. Who does not envy that skill of poet or musician which is able to touch the heart and call the tear of sympathy with an unknown sorrow to the eye?

"Have you heard the news this morning, Miss Massing?" asked Mrs. Blount, rising from the sofa as that lady entered the room.

"No. I have been in my own apartment all day; Maud was tired after the ball, so begged me to have our breakfast up stairs."

"Such news!" joined in the neglected Miss Bridges. "We were quite right in our opinion of certain people, were we not, Mrs. Blount?"

"Quite right," chimed in the other.

"I am at a loss to make out your meaning," said Miss Massing, rather petulantly.

"Oh, I shall give you all the particulars as they were related to me by an eye-witness," continued Mrs. Blount quickly, as if she feared her friend might be beforehand with her, and communicate the spiteful intelligence first. "I dare say you may remember our warning you about the intimacy existing between the Carpenters and Miss Smith, and now, I am grieved to say, our fears were well grounded. Mr. Arthur Carpenter was seen this morning, about one o'clock, at the station, in company with Miss Smith, and they got into a first-class carriage and went off."

There was a degree of triumph in the manner in which the amiable lady pronounced the last words, that in no way showed the grief of which she had spoken in the beginning of her story. Miss Massing looked shocked; she was really afraid the news might be true, and sorrow for her friend already touched her kind heart. She said nothing, but stood quite still whilst Mrs. Blount continued—

"I have my intelligence from the best authority; Mrs. Graves's maid was at the station this morning herself, and saw it with her own eyes."

"It may only be a servant's gossip, after all," thought Miss Massing. "I must go and learn the rights of it, however," and, without waiting to hear more, she left the room. Maud, who was singing at the time, did not notice her aunt's sudden disappearance, and on turning from the piano she asked what had become of her.

"I do not know," said Miss Bridges, carelessly. "She left the room a moment ago, but I suppose she will be back presently."

“ We have had the misfortune to be the first to communicate some bad news to your aunt, Miss Erving ; perhaps our announcement of it was rather too abrupt. She has, I believe, gone to recover herself a little,” remarked Mrs. Blount in a supremely soothing tone of voice.

“ Excuse me, Blanche dear, for an instant ; I must see what is the matter,” and Maud ran out of the room.

“ Pray take a seat, Miss Farncourt,” said Mrs. Blount, patronisingly.

“ What a horrid old woman ! ” thought Blanche, and then added aloud, “ Thank you, my friend will, I doubt not, be back directly.”

“ I am afraid not,” said Mrs. Blount. “ This news is likely to distress Miss Erving as well as her aunt.” She said this in hopes of raising Blanche’s curiosity, and thus having the great pleasure of communicating a piece of scandal over again, but she did not know the person with whom she had to deal, and was, therefore, not prepared for Blanche’s cool demeanour, as she said—

“ I am sorry to hear it.”

Count Porskinski was, however, of a more inquisitive nature, and approaching Miss Bridges he asked for an explanation, which that lady was only too ready to give. Maud was really frightened at what Mrs. Blount had said, and flew upstairs to her aunt with a beating heart ; at the door of the sitting-room she met Miss Massing dressed for going out and looking quite composed.

“ What is the matter, aunt ? ” asked she breathlessly. “ Nothing of any great consequence has happened, I hope ? ”

“ Do not frighten yourself, my dear Maud ; I believe it is all invention from beginning to end,

but that spiteful Mrs. Blount says Arthur Carpenter has run off with Miss Smith."

"Oh, is that all!" said Maud, with a sigh of relief.

"All?" repeated Miss Massing; "surely you could not have expected anything worse?"

"Yes, I did; I was afraid something had happened to you, for she merely told me you had gone upstairs to recover yourself. But where are you going now?"

"I am going to Lydia. I want to learn the truth of this story, and I do not intend to believe it till I have heard her confirm Mrs. Graves's lady's-maid's statement; for it was she who brought the news to Mrs. Blount, and you know she may very easily have mistaken the people."

"Yes, without being accused of stupidity, for I am sure Mr. Carpenter is the image of half the young men one sees. Will it be such a very sad blow to Lydia, if it should prove true? I cannot imagine anybody liking him very much, and I am sure if I had been his sister I should have had hard work to love him."

"Hush! Maud; do not detain me now; go down to your friend. I shall not be away long."

Mrs. Blount was greatly disappointed on seeing Maud's contented expression of countenance as she returned after a few minutes' absence.

"Have you seen your aunt, my dear Miss Erving?" asked she, curiously.

"Yes, I have this moment left her," was the short reply.

"I hope she is not much distressed at the sad news?"

"Oh, no, not at all. She has gone out on business, but will be back soon. Is it not time for

us to be wending our way to the station, Blanche?" added she, turning to her friend.

"If you are ready, I am," was the reply, and the two young ladies left the room together.

"What a dreadful set of old women you seem to have here!" ejaculated Blanche, as soon as they had got safe into Miss Massing's sitting-room.

"Oh, they do not trouble me," said Maud. "I see very little of them; but they are very spiteful to my aunt, which makes me excessively angry."

"What tricks I would play them!" cried Blanche, laughing. "This house should be too hot to hold them, and no one should know the cause."

"It is lucky, then, for Miss Briggs that I am here instead of you. Can you wait in patience for ten minutes whilst I put on my bonnet?"

"I hope so," replied Blanche, going towards a bookcase well filled with prettily bound books, and picking out the brightest cover she could find.

"Good by; I will not keep you long," and Maud sprang lightly out of the room.

Miss Massing was shown into Lydia's bedroom, where she found her bathed in tears, and the kind old lady saw at once that all her fears were well founded. She advanced quickly to her young friend, and, without saying a word, clasped her in her arms.

Oh, the inexpressible pleasure of feeling that there is some one who can sympathise in your sorrow! Lydia had had to mourn in secret; her parents looked upon her with suspicion, and treated

her as an accomplice. She felt that she had erred and deserved some of their censure, but not the amount which was poured upon her, and she had to endure the sense of wrong as well as that of sorrow. Like a comforting angel the kind face of Miss Massing beamed upon her, and she nestled in her protecting arms as a sick-hearted child on its mother's breast.

"You have heard all and have come to comfort me. I am so lonely in my sorrow, you do not know what joy the sight of your face gave me," murmured Lydia, still sobbing, though not so violently.

"Calm yourself, my poor child; I have not heard all, but you shall tell it me. There, sit down, and do not try to speak just yet; you will be better soon."

Miss Massing spoke as if she were really addressing a child, and a faint smile played round Lydia's mouth, as she took her friend's hand and said, softly—

"You are so kind."

"No, no, I am not; it is all selfishness on my part; I liked the idea of coming to comfort you, and I came to please myself. It was nothing but selfishness."

"A very kind sort of selfishness. I never knew the real comfort of a sympathising face till now."

"Then you will go amongst the poor with renewed pleasure," said Miss Massing. "For now you know and can appreciate the feelings with which the sick and suffering greet your smile."

"Alas! I have not your face, mine cannot inspire the same comfort."

"Hush! no flattery," continued Miss Massing.

“ You know it is not the face that awakens those feelings, it is the heart which speaks through the expression.”

“ There, that is just what I meant. You have such a heavenly expression.”

Miss Massing looked vexed, and Lydia continued, hurriedly—“ Do not be angry with me, I will not say anything more about the matter, only promise me one thing.....” she paused and looked searchingly into Miss Massing’s face. “ If I should be very ill, you will not refuse to come and nurse me. I have no mother.” There was something so mournful in the tone with which she pronounced those words that the good old lady’s eyes overflowed, and it was some time before she could say—

“ There is nothing I should like better ; but do not speak of illness, you are young and healthy.”

Lydia shook her head. “ I am young but not healthy. What does it matter ? I am of little use to any one, and a great burden on some. I am so blind and foolish, when I wish to do right I do wrong. Oh, Miss Massing, you do not know what I have suffered within the last hour ! My mother is so enraged against me ; I had but just quitted her when you came in ; she is with my father now. They suspect me because I refused to show the letter my brother wrote to me in the heat of passion, which would have exasperated my father still more against him. They think that it must have criminated me, because I tore it in pieces with disgust ; it was unworthy of Arthur ; he could not have been himself when he wrote it. But I must not tell them that ; I must let them believe all—anything, for I must bring him back, must save him

from the misery of alienation ; he must not want a home and the sympathy home alone can give."

"He has one," said Miss Massing, slowly.

Lydia started—"Ah, yes, he has a new one, but will it bring happiness? *She* deceived her friend."

There was a pause ; Lydia breathed heavily, as if her heart were too full, and then she coughed a deep hollow cough that rang through the room. Miss Massing looked at her and took her hand, saying—

"When did you catch cold?"

"Oh, I have forgotten all about my cold now ; I caught one the day of our adventure, but it is quite well. Perhaps the fog to-day has brought back my cough ; you know I always have a slight one."

"You must nurse it, Lydia ; I will take your class at the school."

"Will you always take it for me?"

"What do you mean?"

"I am never to go there again."

There was an expression, on any other person's face we should have called it scorn, but the word seems so inapplicable to Miss Massing, that we do not know what to call it, and must let our readers imagine the effect this announcement produced on a thoroughly good-natured face.

"Is it possible, does your father's resentment extend thus far? He will, I have no doubt, relent before long."

Lydia shook her head, saying very gravely—"I have reason to think, on the contrary, that he will only enforce this point more strongly. You know my mother's opinions, and can imagine why I have

come to this conclusion, which is, of course, very painful to me."

"You mistake, Lydia, you have always concealed your mother's views from me; I know nothing farther than that she is one of Mr. Pipkin's flock."

"Can you not guess the rest?" asked Lydia. "She disapproves of me, and more especially of Mr. Montague, and therefore will be glad of this opportunity of weaning me from his congregation. I have often been threatened by this before, and there wanted but the spark to set the whole in a blaze. The more I think of what is sure to follow, the more I tremble. Give me your advice, Miss Massing, you have always been kind to me, and will assist me in my difficulty."

"Nay, how can I!" exclaimed Miss Massing alarmed. "I am always wanting a prop myself; I dare not offer advice."

"But consider, for one moment, I am of age; ought I to assert my right of judgment, or ought I to submit without a murmur, but with my whole soul burning with a sense of wrong? Consider, for one moment, my dear Miss Massing—let your heart speak—whatever it dictates is sure to be good."

"You puzzle, me, Lydia; you are such a thoughtful person yourself, I gather a great deal of wisdom from merely listening to you—but really I cannot—I cannot think at all. Would you not do best to go to Mr. Montague at once, and ask his advice?"

"But suppose I am kept prisoner for some time?—this is not unlikely."

Miss Massing looked thoroughly amazed. "You

are joking, Lydia, such a thing is quite impossible, especially with your indulgent parents."

"I did not mean to imply anything against them; if they take strong measures in this matter, it will be with the best intentions. A more conscientious man than my father does not exist, but they may wish to prevent my having recourse to the person whose advice you suggest my seeking, and then how shall I act?"

"Think it over when you are alone to-night, search your heart, find out its secret motives, and pray for strength to judge rightly—ere morning dawns you will see everything in a clearer light. I always do when I use this method, but as I am my own mistress, I have never been placed in a similar situation, at least not since..... Well, never mind, I was influenced by very different motives and circumstances when I was tried, and I trust I acted well when the moment of decision arrived. I asked advice, of course, so I went by a very good man's opinion."

Lydia had not listened to the last part of this sentence—she was too busily engaged with her own perplexities to think of the by-gone trials of others—so when Miss Massing ceased speaking, she merely said—

"Thank you, I will try and follow your advice."

"No, not my advice," said Miss Massing, interrupting her. "I only repeat the words of much more learned people than myself."

"You never give yourself credit for anything, but I know better." A voice was heard at that instant, on the stairs, calling Lydia. "It is my father. I must go. Will you see him now, or not till he has recovered this severe shock? Per-

haps it would be wiser for you not to see him ; he might not take it quite in the right light."

"Oh no, I will leave you now. Go to him, dear, and when you are both in the dining-room I will slip out of the house ; I only came to see you."

"A thousand thanks." Lydia kissed her and rose, but the movement brought on a violent fit of coughing, and Miss Massing looked sorrowfully after her as she left the room.

"Poor girl, poor girl ! she is not careful of herself. I do not like that nasty, hard cough."

CHAPTER XV.

UP AND DOWN.

WHO has not watched the indefatigable movements of a fashionable crowd on a seaside parade with wonder? Up and down, up and down for hours; no one dreams of the distance they are walking, or would they believe their own eyes if the number of times they went over the self-same piece of ground was carefully written down by a trustworthy observer.

The German band has been playing exactly half an hour when we arrive on the scene of action, but few people have yet collected together, for, strange to say, the fashion now-a-days is to be late for everything. People even boast of never arriving at a railway station till the last bell rings, and are not at all ashamed of seeing the last carriage disappear from their sight and they left on the platform; we will not say they are not disappointed, for we believe in their heart of hearts they are, though no sign of internal emotion is ever seen on a fashionable person's face. But to return to the parade—Captain Bissenthorpe has been there since the first appearance of the band, and he has joined Miss Flounce and her aunt, as there is as yet no

appearance of the Honourable Miss Farncourt, or indeed any of that party. Miss Flounce looks supremely happy, and talks and laughs a great deal; she has quite forgotten Captain Bissenthorpe's slighting behaviour towards her on the previous evening, and is ready to receive him into her good graces again.

Count Porskinski has also been beforehand with us, and is leaning against the back of a bench watching the new arrivals, as if expecting to see some one of his acquaintance. The band is playing a melancholy air from an Italian opera, and he beats time with his foot on the ground. It is high tide, and the waves are dashing close to the parade, rattling the shingle in their retreat. Some little boys have collected as near the water's edge as possible, and are amusing themselves by throwing stones into the cresting waves as they advance. Count Porskinski, tired of waiting, turns and watches their game. The fog has cleared away; the soft blue sky of evening looks down from the heavens, and the sun casts its slanting rays across the expanse of water. Fishing-boats are seen one by one leaving the harbour on their night's adventure, and the cry of the sailors is heard at times between the intervals in the music. "Heave-a-hoy-oy-oy!" and the dark brown sails are hoisted to their places whilst the soft air gently swells them, and after lingering a moment at the mouth of the harbour, as if loath to leave their quiet home, they veer round and fly off to sea.

Up strikes the music again, but this time it is a song—a song of the German Fatherland—and after a prelude, the men put down their instruments and sing. The well-known air falls on Count Porskinski's ear; he turns and advances

towards the group of singers, and listens attentively to the words—

Where is the German's fatherland?
Is 't Prussia? Swabia? Is 't the strand
Where grows the vine, where flows the Rhine?
Is 't where the gull skims Baltic's brine?
No; yet more great and far more grand
Must be the German's fatherland!

How call they then the German's land?
Bavaria? Brunswick? Hast thou scanned
It where the Zuyder Zee extends?
Where Styrian toil the iron bends?
No, brother, no; thou hast not spanned
The German's genuine fatherland!

* * * *

Where, therefore, lies the German's land?
Name now at last that mighty land!
Where'er resounds the German tongue,
Where German hymns to God are sung,
There, gallant brother, take thy stand!
That is the German's fatherland!

Count Porskinski happened to raise his eyes at this part, and exactly opposite, gazing directly at the conductor, stood Maud Erving; he did not move towards her, but remained precisely in the same position. The love of country was at that moment uppermost in his heart, and he listened intently to the last verse of Arndt's beautiful patriotic song, which was sung with zest—

That is the German's fatherland!
Great God! look down and bless that land!
And give her noble children souls
To cherish while existence rolls,
And love with heart, and aid with hand,
Their universal fatherland!

Then, with a sigh, he turned away to look upon the tossing sea, which divided him from the scenes of his youth.

"You have performed your promise well, Count," said a soft, musical voice close beside him. "How well they sang to-night!"

He started, and a smile played round his mouth as he saw Maud standing near him. "She might make even an exile's life happy," he thought, "but she is cruel, like all the world;" then bowing to Blanche, who was with her, he said aloud—

"I am glad you liked it, and are come this fine evening. You know I foretold that the sun would shine."

"I wish you would be kind enough, Count Porskinski, to use your influence with the men, and make them sing again," said Blanche. "We only heard half that song."

"I shall be most happy by and by, but I am sure I should fail were I to try now that the men are tired," said the Count, bowing again.

"Let me do that office for you, Miss Farn-court?" interposed Mr. Holford. "What shall I ask them to sing?"

"Do you speak German?" asked Blanche, turning towards him.

"Like a native; at least, that is to say, not at all, but I am sure I should be inspired on this occasion, especially if you tell me what to say."

Blanche laughed, said she agreed with Count Porskinski in thinking it would be more politic to wait; and they all moved forwards, Lord Reynold-forde and the Marquis de Montanvert leading the way. They had not gone far before they met Captain Bissenthorpe, who immediately quitted Miss Flounce and joined their party, evidently to

Mr. Holford's displeasure. After a few words with Lord Reynoldforde, he fell back, and inquired politely of Blanche whether she was exhausted with her dancing on the previous night, and a thousand other questions, which had been put twenty times before that day.

"I should think Miss Farncourt never tired of dancing, she springs along so lightly," said Mr. Holford.

"Then you think there is no effort required to spring," rejoined Blanche, looking at Maud.

"Pardon me, I did not say that, I only meant to imply that the lighter the person the less the exertion."

"I do not agree with you; we have all strength proportioned to us according to our body, and frequently the heavier people are the strongest after all."

"What are you talking about, Blanche?" demanded Maud. "Are you having a learned discussion with Mr. Holford?"

"No, quite the contrary; the simplest questions and answers imaginable. But what have you done with the Count?"

"He has gone to see if my aunt will not join us. I thought a stroll this lovely evening would do her good."

"Yes," said Blanche. "I only wish we could have persuaded Mademoiselle Lafoure to come out; but people with headaches are very hard to manage, they always will have their own way."

"I suppose it is the best for them under such circumstances," remarked Captain Bissenthorpe, pulling his whiskers.

"Well, perhaps it is. They say people can doctor themselves best, but it is not satisfactory for

their friends. Every one has their own peculiar pet little remedy to offer, and it is delightful to find a patient willing to be doctored. I wanted Mademoiselle Lafoure to take *sal volatile*, but she insists upon eating pepper, and varying the dose every five minutes by a mouthful of *eau sucré*. It is dreadful to see her, she sneezes for half an hour together, and tears run down her cheeks with the exertion. She is very light, Mr. Holford, and still she finds the act of sneezing tire her."

Their conversation was here interrupted by Lord Reynoldforde, who suddenly turned round and addressed Blanche thus—

"What do you think of having some charades on board the 'Firefly?' The Marquis says you would act beautifully, and he undertakes to arrange all dresses with the help of Mademoiselle, and your valuable suggestions."

Blanche did not answer, but the two gentlemen expressed their delight at the notion, which quite contented the nobleman.

"Miss Erving, you will, I hope, take a part? We must have rehearsals and arrangements of all sorts," said Lord Reynoldforde.

"I never acted in my life," replied Maud.

"Then we shall have the honour of bringing your talent out. Blanche knows nothing of the art as yet, but the Marquis will put us all in the right way. We have nothing to do but follow his instructions; he says he used to manage plenty of charades in France."

"And what is the word to be, Marquis?" asked Blanche, and her lip curled slightly in addressing him.

"That," replied he, with a shrug of the shoul-

ders, "must be agreed upon when we have chosen our actors."

"Let us choose them at once," said Lord Reynoldforde, eagerly. "We cannot do better than secure the present company."

"If these messieurs agree," rejoined the Marquis.

A ready acquiescence was given, and a conference immediately entered upon, though no satisfactory result was attained.

"Well," said Lord Reynoldforde, "it is not to be supposed we can arrange everything in a hurry, that would be most unreasonable. Let us meet to-morrow on board the 'Firefly,' we will have our first cruise, weather permitting, and can talk over our plans at leisure."

"I have a book of French charades," said the Marquis, "which may aid us; perhaps, too, we might act one of them, if these messieurs speak French." Captain Bissenthorpe looked at Holford, and *vice versá*, but there was a decided negative expressed in their faces.

"Oh, there is no difficulty," said the Marquis. "We will act in English, I taking a foreigner's part, in which any mistake will be excused."

"Bravo!" ejaculated Lord Reynoldforde. "You will be all the more interesting, I assure you. May we hope for your society, Miss Erving, on our cruise to-morrow?"

"I cannot promise," replied Maud. "I must ask my aunt's consent first."

"There will be no difficulty, I hope, in securing that," continued he. "Is not that lady your aunt, who is this moment crossing the street with a foreign gentleman?"

Maud looked in the direction pointed out, and

saw at one glance that it was her aunt who had easily yielded to Count Porskinski's persuasions.

"We have a plot against you, aunt," said she, as soon as she was within hearing. "Lord Reynoldforde has been kind enough to invite me to join their yachting party to-morrow."

Miss Massing looked rather disconcerted at being so suddenly introduced amongst a crowd of strangers, and Count Porskinski looked far from pleased to hear of the proposed day's pleasuring.

"You must not refuse, Miss Massing," said Blanche, in a beseeching tone. "Your niece is one of my oldest and dearest friends; we do not often see each other, now that our school days are over, and we know not how soon we may be separated again."

"If it is Maud's wish I would not think of stopping her enjoyment, but for my own part, had I been in her position, I should not accept, as I have a great objection to the sea."

"Have you, Maud?" asked Blanche.

"I do not think so. At all events, I should like to see if I have."

"Well, dear, you may decide for yourself, I will not say nay."

"Thank you, Miss Massing," said Blanche, eagerly. "Then it is all settled, and Maud will be of our party."

The sun had now set, and twilight darkened the scene, which ever and anon was brightened by the glare of sheet lightning, the brilliant colouring of which was mirrored in the sea. The Germans had ceased playing and were standing with their instruments in their hands upon the beach, watching the scene, and speculating as to the appearance

of the summer lightning, which was attracting all eyes from its extreme beauty.

Count Porskinski was the first to remark it, and calling the attention of the others, they stood watching for its reappearance. The air was sultry; even the soft breeze that had blown from off the sea at the beginning of the evening had now lulled, and the fishing-boats lay becalmed at no great distance from the harbour, their dark sails standing out in strong relief against the illumined sky.

“We shall have a storm to-night,” said Lord Reynoldforde. “Do you see those clouds banking up to the left? they will not pass over our heads without giving us a benefit.” He had scarcely said the words, when a distant roll of thunder was heard issuing from their dark recesses, and presently a vivid sheet of fire shot up over the heavens, giving a ghastly hue to every object far and near.

Blanche, who had been watching the horizon very intently, turned her head away to avoid the glare, and in doing so her eyes encountered those of the Marquis de Montanvert fixed upon her with an expression of admiration. She could not meet that look—she preferred even the dazzling brightness of the lightning. A feeling of intense dislike shot to her heart, and with it was mingled for the first time that of fear. There was a look of conscious power, nay, triumph in those eyes; she shrank from them as she would from her bitterest enemy. Yet there had been nothing in the Marquis’s manner to lead her to think he was one, for strange to say, he had not attempted to approach her all that evening, except when civility obliged him to do so.

“He cannot really admire me,” thought Blanche, “for he shows no sign of discontent at the presence of two rivals, who since I have had the misfortune to be introduced to them, have scarcely left me a moment’s peace. But that look!—to my dying day, I shall never forget that moment, it will haunt my dreams at night. Perhaps he knows I hate and abhor him, and triumphs in his power over my poor father, which he can exercise in spite of me. I must teach him better—I will make him rue the moment when he first gave me reason to fear him—but how? Poor weak woman that I am, deprived of even woman’s influence over my nearest relation on earth—I can, at all events, make him think that though I saw that look, I do not fear him—that, at least, will lower his pride. Thank heaven, he cannot read my heart.”

“We had better be turning homewards, Blanche,” said Lord Reynoldforde. “The storm may come up quicker than we imagine; as it is, those dark clouds have soon taken the place of the clear blue sky.”

“I am ready,” rejoined Blanche; then turning to the Marquis, she said, “I am so blinded with that flash, that I can only see indistinctly, might I ask for your aid?” Each word was measured, and had the peculiar intonation that may mean anything, from the greatest irony to the most profound politeness. The Marquis offered his arm without the least show of pleasure. Mr. Holford looked at them, and held back, but there was a feeling in his heart to which it was lucky for the Marquis he could not give vent.

“I trust this storm will not bring us bad weather for our excursion to-morrow,” said Lord

Reynoldforde. "We must hope for the best, and till then, adieu."

"Maud," cried Blanche, "come early." There was sorrow in the tone with which she uttered those words, and Maud felt her hand pressed convulsively as they parted.

Who can fathom the depths of the Marquis's policy? He had one great end in view; it was his only chance of freedom from the bonds of debt, and never did he lose sight of it for an instant; he did not attempt to press his suit after the interview he had had with Lord Reynoldforde; he knew that it was useless, for he saw Blanche's dislike to him, but feeling sure of victory in the end, he only waited for an opportunity to act, and, in the meantime, used all his influence with the weak nobleman, to gain that end to which all the powers of his mind were now directed. This then was the man on whose arm Blanche leant, and although she was naturally of a discerning mind, she mistook his object; nor did she even perceive that she herself was his intended victim, when their eyes met, and that one momentary glance sent a pang to her heart. She thought he triumphed in his power over her father, and longed for an opportunity to despoil him of that power.

Maud walked between her aunt and the Count in silence, each were occupied with their own thoughts, and it was not before they reached the door of the Boarding House, that the Count broke through the restraint silence had imposed, and said with a smile—

"An angel has flown over us, Miss Erving, and I have had the good fortune to find it."

"What do you mean?" demanded she, in some surprise, and he continued—

"It is an expression we Germans make use of, when there has been a long pause in the conversation, and the one who speaks first is said to find the angel."

"What a curious thing! I suppose it is the angel who presides over talking and conversation of all kinds."

"That, unfortunately, I am unable to decide for you; it is very difficult to account for popular expressions, but I suppose they all have an origin."

"Everything has, and it must be an interesting study to find out what that origin must have been."

"There are plenty of bookworms in Germany who are always hunting after such things, but, for my part, I prefer poetry and imagination to searching for facts in musty old books and dirty, half illegible manuscripts; surely, Miss Erving, you agree with me."

"For my own part, I do, but I can appreciate the pleasure of such researches, although they must entail a great deal of disappointment on the man whose study it is to make them out."

"Why, Maud," said Miss Massing, who stood on the door-step listening to them, "I thought you were too much wrapped up in your zoophytes to think it possible there could be any other amusing occupation in the world."

"I am fond of anything that keeps away ennui, and when you have more to do than you know how to get through, there is no fear of that creeping in, is there, aunt Lucy?"

"Will you give me your receipt for happiness?" asked the Count in German.

"You have just heard it," said she. "I know

of no better, but perhaps it would not suit all people."

"There are some sorrows which embitter everything on earth; perhaps you have never felt such pain as that I speak of, if so, may it never darken your existence as it has done mine."

Maud looked at him; the light from the street lamp fell full on his manly face, and she felt deeply touched by the expression that met her gaze.

"Thank you," she murmured, and turning round sprang up the steps into the house.

Count Porskinski watched her disappear, then with a sigh he returned to the beach, nor did he re-enter the house till the heavy drops of rain from the thunder-cloud, which had so long threatened to discharge its contents upon the little town, warned him to take shelter. The lightning and thunder soothed the wild beatings of his heart, and awoke once more the hate against the tyrants of his country which the patriotic song of the Germans had rekindled within his breast.

CHAPTER XVI.

A CRUISE.

NOT a sign of the heavy storm which had rent the heavens on the previous evening was visible when the party collected on board the "Firefly" for their proposed cruise. The sea was calm, the sun shone forth warm and bright, whilst some fleeting clouds chased each other across the scene, and their long shadows gave variety to its monotony for, beautiful as the ocean is, there cannot fail to be monotony in its movement, however varied the colouring may be.

It was some time before all the necessary arrangements could be made—first one thing was forgotten, then another, and when at length they did start, it was found that Mademoiselle Lafoure had been left behind, and she was seen waving her handkerchief on the pier; the vessel was immediately stopped, and the boat put out to bring her, which was soon done, and the "Firefly" steamed out of the harbour beneath many an admiring gaze. Lord Reynoldforde stood by the Captain, giving him some few instructions. Blanche busied herself in making her old governess as comfortable as she could; Maud stood beside them. Captain Bissen-

thorpe professed his readiness to do everything in his power, and got very much in the way, whilst Mr. Holford and the Marquis paced the deck, conversing very amicably about things in general, and the favourable weather in particular. They had not gone very far, however, before the quick eye of the former discerned his friend Macklaren's boat, and, darting across the deck to where Maud was seated, he exclaimed—

“There is Macklaren out dredging! Do you see that little boat, not far from us, with several men in it, Miss Erving? Well, that is his craft, and if you look through my glass you will see Macklaren himself sitting at one side looking this way—of course he is admiring us. I wish we were near enough to hail him. He did not know what time we were to start; he is such a fellow, he was out before six himself, and I was asleep, and had not time to tell him anything.”

“I thought he was out dredging yesterday,” said Maud, vainly endeavouring to steady the telescope.

“No, it was much too foggy in the morning, so he put it off. Whatever he can find to amuse him in fishing for those little monsters I cannot conceive; but I beg pardon, I believe I am addressing one who shares this—may I say—peculiarity.”

“Oh, you may say anything you like, I am quite accustomed to be laughed at,” replied Maud, still struggling with the telescope.

“Permit me to assist you with that heavy glass, here—wait one instant—now I will kneel down, and you shall make a stand of my head.”

Maud hesitated, but Mr. Holford was in earnest, so she did his bidding, and was not long in finding the right focus.

“A most beautiful, touching group,” said Lord Reynoldforde, who had come up to the party. “Pray, Blanche, have you got your pencil ready to take them as they stand now?—oh, if you please, Miss Erving, do not let me disturb you.”

Maud laughed, and Mr. Holford sprang lightly to his feet, relieving her of the telescope with a graceful bow, and turning to Blanche, he said—

“I shall be most happy to perform the same manœuvre for you, Miss Farncourt, if you feel as great an interest in a dredging party as we do.”

He laid a stress on the word *we*—at least so Maud thought—and from that moment she took a dislike to him; she fancied he believed she was in love with his friend, and interpreted, henceforth, every word, look, or gesture on his part to be in allusion to that. “I in love with a man who cares nothing for me?” thought Maud indignantly, but to her great disgust there was something very deep down in her heart, which said there were things more impossible than that; and, what was worse, the same tell-tale voice said it thought the young naval officer was not quite indifferent to her, and if it should turn out to be the case, there was no knowing what would happen.

Maud felt heartily displeased at herself, and stoically determined not to think at all; but from that moment her eyes would wander in the direction of the little boat long after it was out of sight, and the tiresome voice within her breast would keep whispering “Captain Macklaren,” till she began to think there must be something in it. Great things have often little beginnings—a word, a look may change the course of nations, then how much more may they not work their wonders in the recesses of that world of thought—the human

heart? The little word "we" had wrought a change in Maud—had made her search into her own feelings, and there discover a secret which had till then been concealed even to herself. Captain Macklaren had much to thank his friend Holford for, and yet from that hour Maud took a dislike to the latter, and avoided his society as much as possible.

"A most picturesque scene you have been enacting," said Blanche jokingly to her friend, as soon as the gentleman had moved away. "There can be little doubt who Mr. Holford admires now."

"Nonsense, Blanche, it was the most natural thing in the world, but I am very angry with him, nevertheless."

"Oh, for shame! why should you be angry with a poor man for doing you a service?"

"Service, indeed! I should have seen very well without his making himself so ridiculous."

"Yet you put the telescope on his head, and, to all appearance, entered into the joke. Poor Mr. Holford! I really must take his part to-day; for he has lost a valuable ally in you."

"And gained one in you, Blanche, which he will like much better; but pray do not talk any more about him, I shall get quite angry if you do."

Blanche laughed gaily, and by way of changing the subject, offered to show her friend the cabins. Maud consented, and they both descended the companion-ladder to the saloon, which was exquisitely fitted up—luxurious sofas lined the walls, and innumerable mirrors reflected the different objects a thousand times. The two friends paused a few minutes to examine each thing separately, then passing beneath an arched doorway, before

which a scarlet curtain hung, they entered a little cabin containing two pretty little beds, a toilette table, and a washing stand.

"This is my room, Maud," said Blanche, seating herself on one of the beds. "What do you think of our summer residence?"

"I think it is quite charming—so exquisitely fitted up!" was the enthusiastic rejoinder.

"It is not quite so spacious as my room at Farncourt Hall, but I am very fond of it already, and am quite content, especially as I have that dear face to look at me"—she pointed to a beautiful miniature above the dressing-table. "You can guess who it is, though you never saw her."

"Your mother," murmured Maud, in tones of deep respect.

"Yes," said Blanche. "I never go anywhere without it. She smiles at me when I open my eyes, blesses me when I close them at night, talks to me when I am lonely, and bids me follow in her steps when the world seems false and wicked, and I despair of finding goodness, hope, and peace. We are both orphans, Maud," she added, after a pause of some seconds. "It was that which first made us love each other. Your path in life lies open and clear before you, mine is shrouded, beset with difficulties you must never know. Will you promise to love me always through the long hours of this dreary world? Will you help me to act rightly, be less proud, less selfish, more like her? I want friends, Maud; I am very lonely in the midst of riches, luxuries, pleasures."

"You, Blanche? Is it possible that you can talk thus, surrounded by admirers, adorers, I may say? You are in low spirits this morning; you do not always think in this way."

“Yes, I do ; and I will repeat again, that I am lonely. Look round, Maud, and tell me to whom I might fly for consolation, advice, and comfort.”

“To your father,” replied the other, somewhat reproachfully.

“Alas ! no, he would not understand me ; besides.....Ah, what was I going to say ?—forgive me, Maud—there are secrets in my family which must not be known ; but, believe me, my father could never be my adviser—rather would I die than follow what he might dictate. You look shocked, and turn from me as if I were in error. Raise your eyes to that face—there is no shade of wickedness upon her brow, no wild, unruly passions gnawing at her heart ; but even she who bade me honour, love, and obey him in all things reasonable, taught me rather to shield him than follow in his steps. You cannot understand this, dear Maud ; may you never have cause to learn the hard lesson of hope disappointed ; may you never see your life-long endeavours marred. Thank heaven, she is dead, and died unconscious of what was so soon to occur ; soon, did I say ? Yes, even before the cold earth had settled upon her grave.”

“Hush, Blanche ! your feelings will lead you on to tell me something which you will afterwards wish unsaid. We came to see the cabins, did we not ?”

“Forgive me, Maud, and promise to give me advice when I most need it. You know not the good that it may one day be in your power to do.”

“How can I advise when I do not know the wound that lies far out of my reach, and closely concealed from all eyes save One ?”

“You are right,” said Blanche, after a pause. “I must act on my own judgment ; it is my hard lot

to be forced to live on without a confidant and friend."

"Save God," interposed Maud, softly. Blanche remained motionless, as if struck by that word; then suddenly a beam of light shot from her dark eye, and seizing Maud's hand, she said, in low, eager tones—

"Thank you, I see all now. I have leant too much on earthly support. I have cherished an idol in my heart; God pardon me, for that idol was as pure and holy as the angels in heaven."

She buried her face in her hands, and wept hot tears of repentance. Who that saw her then would believe she was the same Blanche Farncourt, whose haughty brow looked as if it could never bend to sorrow? Little do we, who judge from outward appearances, know of the secrets of the heart.

"Blanche, dearest Blanche, do not weep, you make me so miserable. What can I say to soothe you? I will do anything to please you, only look up and dry your eyes; this must not be, indeed it must not."

How often have words like these been used by the simple-hearted, in vain endeavours to comfort those whose sorrow is beyond their power of control, merely because the chord that touches them, finds no correspondent feeling in their breast. Blanche raised her head, looked at her friend with a smile of thanks, brushed the sparkling tears from her eyes, and said, with a deep drawn sigh—

"I wish I were more like you, but there is a wide difference in our natures; we cannot judge each other by what we feel ourselves. You will let me pour my sorrows into your kind heart sometimes?"

"Dear Blanche, I am only too glad to think I

can be of any use to you. I shall never forget the happy school days we passed together, and how often you used to help me out of the innumerable difficulties I met with in my lessons. You were always so much quicker than I was."

"Those were little troubles, Maud, and not worth repaying, but I shall have a large debt of gratitude to you, for even now you have done me good; and if you continue as you have begun, I shall never cease to feel the obligation, and you will receive a blessing from a sad heart."

"Do not say sad; you used to long for the time when you should be old enough to be your father's companion, and stay at home to take care of him. Now you have got your wish, and more, if possible."

"Oh! yes, it is very pleasant; at least it would be if I could do what I think right."

"He may be the better judge of the two as to that, may he not?"

"I wish I could think so, but.....well, never mind, you cannot quite understand without knowing all, and that must not be; only let me make you promise one thing."

"What is it? I am quite ready to do so, if it is not too unreasonable," replied Maud.

"If I were to commit any strange error, you must not judge me by your own self, or by what the world says. Think of me as quite different; and having to struggle against circumstances and influences that can never lie in your path, you will not judge my actions so harshly then. And above all, promise to love me with the pure affection of a friend; there is only one other person on earth who does, and I covet such affection more than I can tell you."

"You may trust me, Blanche. I love you as I would a sister had I one, and your faults, if you have any, shall meet with a sister's censure; but I am convinced I never could find anything I should wish altered in you were I to try ever so much."

"Then you cannot be a true friend," said Blanche, gravely.

"Do not say that; think rather that I am a partial one."

"Thank you, Maud. You do then really love me for myself alone?"

"That I do," was the reply. "What else could I love you for?"

"Most people find everything but myself loveable; at least their manner makes me think so."

"What do you mean, Blanche?" asked Maud, in some surprise. "You are such a puzzle to me."

"Am I? Yet my meaning must be clear. Men court me for my money, and as they say themselves for my beauty. Poor fools! a pretty life a temper such as mine might lead them, were I to take them at their word; but if I ever marry it must be for love."

"On your side or on theirs?" asked Maud, smiling.

"On both, of course. I must be a first and only love, or I will never marry."

"How are you to find that requisite out? Men are very deep, and it is not usual to publish such matters."

"You are right there, so I am, I hope, quite safe; but there is no knowing what may be one's fate. You must remember that I said the other day, peculiar circumstances might oblige me to marry."

"Yes, you are a very pleasant kind of enigma,

dear Blanche. I cannot make you out ; and it is much more romantic to look upon you as a mystery, so I will not try. Now I am going to ask a favour ; do not be surprised, but it relates to quite a different matter, and a very material one."

" Pray go on, I am all impatience."

Maud laughed gaily. " This cabin is delightful, and were we stationary in the harbour, I could sit here all day long with the greatest pleasure, but not being accustomed to the motion of the sea as you are, I am beginning to feel giddy, and a longing for fresh air is predominant in my mind at present. May we go on deck ?"

A ringing laugh was Blanche's rejoinder, and springing up from the bed where she had been half reclining, she led Maud gaily through the saloon, and up on deck once more, where a delicious gust of fresh air greeted them, and soon drove all feelings of indisposition away.

" Where have you been burying yourselves ?" asked Lord Reynoldforde. " We cannot allow this monopoly, Blanche. Miss Erving was invited to enjoy sea air, and you have been cooping her up in your little cabin, which is a very different matter. She will give a bad account of us to Miss Massing."

" Maud wished to see the cabins, so we went down to explore them," said Blanche.

" That may be, but not to spend the morning there. Mademoiselle Lafoure has been asking for you both ; she is tired of Captain Bissenthorpe's small talk, will you not go to the rescue ?"

" And receive a volley ourselves," added Blanche, advancing towards the place where the two persons in question were seated.

" What do you think of our little vessel ?" asked

Lord Reynoldforde, of Maud, with an expression of conscious pride.

"I think it quite perfect," was the reply; "and I almost envy Blanche her little room."

"It is very snug, is it not? I shall be most happy to hear of any suggestions as to improvements, if you will name them, Miss Erving."

"I? Oh! that is an impossibility. I see nothing that could be altered; everything is in such complete order; the saloon is quite beautiful."

"Do you admire the colour of the velvet cushions? Montanvert ordered them himself; he is a man of great taste. Frenchmen understand those things so well. I chose the carpet."

"It does you credit. I am no judge myself, but as you asked my opinion, you must not think me rude if I say the scarlet of the curtains does not quite agree with the cushions."

"You are a bold woman, Miss Erving," said Lord Reynoldforde. "That was the Marquis's doing, ha, ha! I really must tell him. Halloo there, Montanvert, here is a question of taste for you to settle. Miss Erving finds that the scarlets down below do not agree, what is your opinion?"

The Frenchman bowed, with a bland smile. "I could not offer mine in opposition to a lady's, which must undoubtedly be the superior of the two."

"Of course, we only wanted to decide the matter, that is all; and as you were the person whose taste was consulted, I called you up."

"Well, in France, we admire a variety in shades, provided they are shades of the same colour, but English taste may differ, and I am ready to yield the point to Miss Erving."

"Pray do not, Monsieur le Marquis," said Maud, carelessly. "It is of so little consequence,

and it would be impossible for the most fastidious person to find fault with anything else. Pray, Lord Reynoldforde, let my stupid query be forgotten. My opinion must have no more weight than it deserves."

"Anything that offends the eye ought to be of consequence," said Lord Reynoldforde. "We will have the curtains altered, that will be the best way, will it not, Montanvert?"

"Decidedly, if the mixture of colour be really offensive to you," rejoined the Marquis.

"Let me entreat you not to think any more about it. You make me quite ashamed of myself," said Maud, eagerly.

"Nay, I am always grateful for any suggestions. Let us go below and see what is to be done. Can you come now, Montanvert?"

There was something so cringing in the manner of the Marquis towards his noble friend, that Maud could not help feeling rather pleased she had mentioned her dislike, and had thereby given him cause to cringe even more than usual. She saw that he had a secret power over Lord Reynoldforde, and that he exercised it very constantly. "I should not be surprised," thought she, "if he were to prove a snake in the grass. Perhaps Blanche alluded to him when she spoke of mystery connected with her father; perhaps he is his evil genius, as it were, leading him on to something bad, yet concealing his intentions so well as to baffle the most searching inquiry."

There is no knowing how bad a character Maud might not have given the Marquis, had she been allowed to think much more, but a call from Blanche roused her from her reverie, and she joined the others at the farther end of the vessel.

“ May I ask what were your thoughts, *ma petite* ?” asked Mademoiselle Lafoure, as Maud approached her. “ Were you turning over in your mind what would be a good word for a charade ? If you have found one, you will have done us a great service, as I cannot get Blanche to like anything I propose. Is it not contrary of her ?”

“ Extremely, Mademoiselle, but I am very stupid in all such matters. I am, I assure you, the very worst person to whom to appeal.”

“ Ah ! your old trick, always abusing yourself ; how often I have scolded you about that, and all in vain !”

The Frenchwoman lifted up her hands as if quite despairing of any reform in her old pupil, and half forgetting she was not still under her control.

“ Dear Mademoiselle Lafoure, I have tried to cure myself, but when one is really stupid what is to be done ?”

“ If that were the case I should say nothing about it, but you know to the contrary, and it has the effect of conceit instead of modesty in you. Now for a punishment,” added the good woman, jokingly ; “ you must find us a word.”

Maud made a long face, and, pretending to be the obedient school-girl, she seated herself on the bench and buried her head in her hands to think.

“ Do not forget that a Frenchman must play a principal part,” suggested Blanche, with a sneer.

“ And a Frenchwoman too, *ma petite*,” added Mademoiselle Lafoure.

“ Why not act the whole in French ?” asked Maud.

“ Because *ces Messieurs* do not understand our language,” rejoined Mademoiselle Lafoure. “ That

would obviate all difficulty, but it cannot be done. Think away, we shall want more than one word."

"Do you like the sea?" asked Blanche, turning to Captain Bissenthorpe, and addressing him in common civility in a language he could understand (for the conversation had hitherto been carried on in French).

"Under such circumstances as I am in, I delight in it; but, in general, I prefer *terra firma*."

"Indeed! We must consider ourselves highly flattered as that is the case."

"Do not do so, I implore you, Miss Farncourt; to have the felicity of sitting beside you would tempt me to undergo any torture."

Blanche laughed. "I should be sorry to think we had been guilty of torturing you. The sea is my natural element, so that I cannot imagine any one disliking it."

"The up and down motion is horrible. If you had been on board a transport ship, as I have, you would agree with me. Crowded to overflowing, everybody ill, no room to lie down, in danger of suffocation by night and agues by day. It is positively horrible! Here you have space, convenience, and luxury; good food, good night's rest, and the company of those you like."

"Pray call it a paradise on earth," added Blanche.

"To me it is, Miss Farncourt, provided I may revel in your smiles."

"What is the man talking about?" asked Maud, in French. She had caught some few words, and they had raised her curiosity.

"A great deal of nonsense," was the reply. "He is the most complete ass I ever had the pleasure to encounter."

"This is not fair, Miss Farncourt," interposed the Captain. "You take advantage of my ignorance, and abuse me in a foreign language."

"He never made a better guess," said Blanche, in French; then turning to him, she added—"What should make you think we were speaking about you? Mademoiselle Lafoure is arranging the charades with Maud; perhaps you can help us to find a word."

"Yes, with pleasure, if you will promise to speak English."

"You are right, Captain," said Mr. Holford, who had come up in time to hear the last sentence. "We must have no French, for it is a shame not to let us join in the conversation."

"Why a shame?" asked Maud. "We have taken pains to learn the language, so we ought to be allowed to use it."

"I do not agree; but being an interested person I ought not to decide in this instance," said Mr. Holford. "Let us appeal to Mademoiselle."

"I have it; I have it!" ejaculated Captain Bissenthorpe. "Love-lies-bleeding is the very word we are in want of—that is to say if I may be allowed to act the part of love. I could go into ecstasies, and be as love-sick as you like. See, I can make a most pathetic face," and the brave officer fell on one knee, and looked up into Blanche's face with a most despondent, lover-like expression. They all laughed heartily.

"That is very well acted; but we must not have anything sentimental," said Blanche. "I hate sentimentality."

"Feigned, but not real, I hope?" rejoined Mr. Holford, in a rather more serious tone than Blanche liked.

"Both," said she, pettishly; "and I despise people who indulge in it."

"You are not, surely, a disbeliever in true devoted attachment?"

"That is too mild a word, Holford," interposed Captain Bissenthorpe. "Say love, it is more what you mean."

"I dare say there may be such a thing, but it does not last long, if there is," remarked Blanche, and then, as if anxious to change the subject, she said—"Where is my father, Mr. Holford? Have you seen him lately?"

"I have but just left him; he was then settling a dispute between the captain and mate, by discharging the latter on the spot."

"Why? What can have happened?"

"Oh, only a row; but it was the only way of arranging it satisfactorily. By George! I never heard a fellow in a greater rage than the captain."

"Perhaps he ought to be the one discharged," suggested Blanche. "A bad temper makes a bad commander."

"Ah, but he is too clever, and understands his business too well to be sent off at a moment's notice. It is not so easy a matter now-a-days to find good experienced men ready at hand."

"I never liked the captain," said Blanche. "In my opinion he has a bad countenance. The Marquis de Montanvert seems fond of his society. They are always conferring together."

"Yes; he was with Lord Reynoldforde just now, when the row took place, and, to tell you the truth, I think it was he who persuaded your father to send the mate away."

Blanche bit her lip, and the thought of her father's weakness brought a blush to her cheek.

“Is he always to be guided by that man? Shame, shame! it must not be. Think of your mother’s dying words. Have you obeyed them as far as you are able?” were the words conscience whispered within her. She became, from that moment, sullen and moody; gave short answers when forced to open her lips, and took the first opportunity to escape to her cabin.

“Miss Farncourt seems to take great interest in the wrongs of the discharged seaman,” remarked Mr. Holford to Maud. “She has not spoken since I told her of his dismissal, and now she has flown away to grieve for his loss in the recesses of her cabin.”

“Blanche has many things to trouble her,” was Maud’s short reply.

“She has not much time allowed her for solitude and reflection,” continued Mr. Holford; “for there is the dinner-bell sounding—a call no human being can resist.”

“You mean no human being is allowed to resist,” interposed Maud, sharply.

“Not at all. I am sure you must confess dinner is a very agreeable amusement, and not the less so for being a necessity (though it is not always one). Everybody collects at that hour, and a degree of social intercourse is enjoyed which cannot be had at any other time of the day.”

“Oh, if you take it in that light, I agree with you; but I fancied you meant the pleasure of eating.”

“Ha, ha! bravo!” laughed Captain Bissenthorpe. “You took Holford for a glutton, and I dare say we are all more or less so, Miss Erving, but you forget he could want nothing whilst in your presence. May I offer you my arm? we will go down. The stairs are not quite so convenient as those of a London house; but, however.....” and

they proceeded to the saloon, where a substantial meal lay spread for them.

Blanche took her seat at the top of the table, and looked rather paler than usual, but there was nothing in her manner that showed what was passing within; indeed she exerted herself to talk to the Marquis, who sat on her right hand, and his cold eye beamed as it encountered hers, with a fire that always made her lower her gaze, however much she wished to appear indifferent. He addressed her as he would a person much younger than himself; spoke of a time when he used to visit at Farncourt Hall; and even mentioned her mother's name, which made Blanche start, and a cloud gathered on her brow, but it had passed off as quickly as it had come, and the Marquis appeared not to have noticed it. But did anything escape his eye?

"A glass of wine with you, Marquis de Montanvert," said Mr. Holford, anxious to draw his attention from Blanche, for he felt a secret jealousy creeping up in his heart. The Marquis looked much younger than he really was, and it was therefore not unnatural that Mr. Holford should regard him as a rival, though no fears of that sort troubled Blanche.

"This Madeira is excellent, try a glass, Bissen-thorpe," said Lord Reynoldforde. "Perhaps the ladies will join, and we will drink to the success of the 'Firefly.'"

"Hear, hear—good luck to the 'Firefly,' and long life to its master."

"And mistress," added Montanvert, bowing to Blanche. She returned the compliment with a cold inclination of the head.

“That fellow must be put down,” thought Holford. “He is always putting his nose first, and taking words out of my mouth.”

Lord Reynoldforde rose, amid great applause, to return thanks for the warmth with which his health had been drunk. He was fond of speaking, and took every opportunity of doing so ; and after a preliminary cough he began. His voice was clear, and he had an easy delivery, but, like most speakers, he said a great deal that was unnecessary, and a great deal that, to all appearance, had no meaning at all ; but to let our readers judge of the merits and demerits for themselves, we will transcribe word for word all that Lord Reynoldforde said, and we hope that having already learned to estimate his character as it deserves, they will not judge it too harshly, or compare it with some few gifted speakers of the day, who shine like stars from amid a herd of our acquaintance, who, though they too do speak, had much better never have attempted the art at all.

As we said before, Lord Reynoldforde coughed, put both his hands on the table, and leaned forwards, to give his hearers a better chance of catching every word, we suppose, although his audience consisted of very few ; and then smiling benignly on all, he began—

“The warmth with which you have drunk my health, and wished prosperity to my little vessel, is, I assure you, my good friends, highly gratifying

to me, and I scarcely know how to express all I feel regarding it. Our cruise to-day has thus far been most successful; may it continue to be so to the end, and may this be but the beginning of a succession of pleasant excursions equally promising, for believe me, my dear friends, you cannot afford me greater pleasure than by consenting frequently to become my guests, and by considering the 'Firefly' as it were a second home. Though I grant the accommodation cannot be so good as what you would have on shore, still I have endeavoured, with the valuable assistance of my kind friend Montanvert, to make it as comfortable as circumstances will admit; and I flatter myself that you do not find a residence on board the 'Firefly' quite intolerable, judging from the kind way in which you one and all wished my little vessel every prosperity." (Hear, hear.)

"Before again seating myself, I cannot refrain from proposing another toast, which I feel sure will be responded to with ardour, when I say that I am greatly indebted to the person to whom I allude for many valuable hints, and much active service, in the fitting up and perfecting of the 'Firefly.' We were school-fellows in our youth" (the Marquis winced slightly), "and have, I may say, been friends ever since, though unavoidable separations have, I now grieve to say, often occurred. I think I need scarcely tell you, I allude

to the Marquis de Montanvert, and now with pleasure drink his health."

Lord Reynoldforde filled his glass and drank it off; the toast was responded to with cold politeness, and Blanche's glass returned to the table untouched, a fact which did not escape the eye of the Marquis.

"Lord Reynoldforde's speech was short and sweet," said Mr. Holford, in a whisper to Maud. "He is not generally so brief."

The truth was the Baron had intended to address the company at much greater length, but finding himself in the act of praising the Marquis, he thought it better to propose his health at once, which he did accordingly, and reseated himself amidst great applause.

"Have you known Lord Reynoldforde long?" inquired Maud of Mr. Holford.

"I have frequently met him in society in London, but till now I have not had the pleasure of a nearer acquaintance."

The Marquis now rose to return thanks, which he did in a short but elegant French speech; and although the delivery did not occupy him more than from five to ten minutes, he managed to compliment every one there present, from Blanche down to Captain Bissenthorpe.

Not long after this the ladies retired to a little cabin adjoining Blanche's sleeping apartment, which was fitted up as a sitting-room. The furniture con-

sisted of a work table, a sofa, two chairs, a hanging book-case, and a small cottage piano. The room could not have held more than three persons comfortably, although there was accommodation for four to sit down, but being intended for Blanche's use alone, it was amply large enough.

"You did not show me this dear little room, Blanche, when I came to see the cabins—how was that?"

"For a very good reason," replied the other, laughing. "You asked me as a great favour to let you go on deck."

"I am sure you had time to see everything thoroughly," said Mademoiselle Lafoure.

"Yes, but we began gossiping in my room, and wasted all the time. It was my fault, but I wanted to have a little private conversation with Maud."

"I think it is very impolite of the English gentlemen to prefer sitting over their wine to the society of ladies," said Mademoiselle Lafoure, glancing at the heavy red curtain that divided the saloon from their little apartment, "especially on a party of pleasure like this; it would never be done in French society."

"Oh!" said Blanche, yawning, "it is a great relief to get rid of them; they never let one have a moment's peace, excepting when their wine comes between, and happily divides us."

"For my part I like the gentlemen," rejoined the French lady.

“ That is because you have not too much of their society. They are all very well when you see them once a day for an hour or so, but when it comes to all day, it is quite another affair.”

“ Perhaps you judge from such persons as the Marquis de Montanvert, Captain Bissenthorpe, &c.,” said Mademoiselle Lafoure, turning her eyes searchingly on Blanche.

“ We always speak from our own experience, but I was not alluding to any one in particular.”

“ Ah, you will think differently some day when that *cold* heart of yours has played you false, and run away.”

Blanche laughed. “ The man I could love does not exist ; besides, I could not bear the position of a wife. I like to rule myself, to be independent and free as air.”

“ All very delightful—who does not love freedom ? but the kind you mean, is incompatible with our position ; we cannot shake off the restraints society imposes on us, and as we cannot be independent, it is better to have the protection of a husband.”

“ Protection !” exclaimed Blanche. “ A pretty protection they often give !”

“ You are speaking of a few sad cases ; it is not always so,” interrupted Maud. “ There are more happy marriages in the world than unhappy ones.”

“ Have I got, then, two antagonists ?” said Blanche ; and she added, with a sneer, “ but I forgot, they say women always wish to marry ; I am sure

nature made a mistake in making me a woman, I never could have been meant for one."

Maud threw her arms round her friend's neck and whispered—"I am very glad the mistake was made," and thus the discussion ended.

When the dessert had been cleared away, and the saloon put in order, the whole party again collected. Games of chess and cards were formed, songs were sung, and a charade rehearsed with great *éclat*. It was eleven o'clock at night before the "Firefly" again approached the town. Lights flickered in every direction, and their bright reflections sparkled in the water, rivalling even in brilliancy the phosphoric light that shot out in lines of sulphuric fire wherever the water was disturbed. Our party saw nothing of this, the beauty of the night was lost upon them; they were too much engrossed with their amusements in the saloon, and were unconscious of the vessel having neared the harbour, till shouts from above and certain peculiar movements informed them of the fact.

CHAPTER XVII.

TROUBLES.

“CAN you spare me half an hour this morning, my dear Miss Massing?” said Lydia Carpenter, entering that lady’s sitting-room. “I want to consult you about my troubles; do not be frightened, it is not the same question I asked you about the day before yesterday, that is now arranged; I am forbidden to enter Mr. Montague’s church, and am never again to attend early service. I wrote to him directly and told him all; he called yesterday, and saw my father. I am afraid the interview was not agreeable to him; he looked very pale when he came to me, bade me obey my parents, and gave me his blessing; it was so like an eternal leave-taking, that it made me very unhappy—and to think that I am to be deprived for ever of his counsel and advice is most painful. You must not abandon me, Miss Massing. If I still have the privilege of seeing your good, kind face, I shall, I hope, be patient, but it is hard to bear.”

She paused, and seeing that bright tears were

trickling down her friend's cheek, she said, "But this is very selfish of me, I ought not to give you pain, and will now talk about Arthur's letter, which I received this morning. My father does not as yet know anything about it; I want to ask your opinion as to whether I ought to show it him or not. Dear, dear Miss Massing, do not distress yourself about me. See, I am happy again, it was only a passing shadow of regret, and it is all gone; it was nothing but selfishness—you must not be unhappy on my account. Shall I read the letter aloud to you? here it is."

Miss Massing wiped the tears from her eyes, and nodded her head in assent. Lydia unfolded the letter, and read aloud in as steady a voice as she could command. It ran as follows:—

"DEAR LID—You may be anxious about our safety, and to avoid giving you any unnecessary anxiety, I take the first opportunity of writing you these lines. You have always been an affectionate sister to me, and I look back on the past with pleasure, so far as it was connected with you. It is true, we had a little too much preachment at times, but you will be glad to hear it has had a good effect on me, and I make a first-rate husband. I regretted that your absence from the marriage was unavoidable, but it went off very well, and we are now extremely comfortable in our London lodgings. Alice had saved a good deal of money, and that,

together with the little I had by me, will last us till I get a clerkship. I have heard of one already, but I dare say it will not suit me ; there is not any occasion to hurry. As there is no necessity to conceal our whereabouts any longer, I have put the address at the top of the page, and shall be glad of a letter when you can find time from your numerous duties at the school. Alice hopes it is all going on well, and that Mr. Montague has found no trouble in supplying her place ; she is sorry she was obliged to leave the town so suddenly, and if any of the tradesmen send in their bills, she hopes you will be kind enough to forward them to us here. She would have written to you herself, but I thought this long epistle would be as much as you could wade through. I hope the governor was not very angry ; he will come round in time, I have no doubt. Keep him in a good humour, and then when we come down to Brimelsea, which we shall do some day, he will be all right again, and receive Alice as a daughter ; a prettier, nicer one he could not have, even if he had chosen her himself. Give our love to those who will accept it, and

“ Believe me to be, your affectionate brother,

“ ARTHUR.”

Miss Massing raised her hands in amazement ; all trace of sorrow had fled from her face, and indignation was marked in every line. Her cap and hair even expressed the general feeling, by

collecting together as much as they could on the top of her head.

“The cold-hearted, impertinent creature!” were the first words she gave vent to.

Lydia actually smiled, and folding up the letter, said gently—“I see, I must not show this to my father, your words have decided its fate,” and she tore it into little morsels, placing each one on the fire.

“That is right; I only regret to think those little atoms will not be burnt till next winter,” said Miss Massing, eagerly.

Lydia smiled sadly. “And that letter was from my brother!” she said, with a sigh.

“A brother in name only, and quite undeserving of such a sister.”

Lydia put her hand gently on Miss Massing’s mouth. “You must not praise me,” she said. “I am very far from good, and was not the sister I ought to have been to him. I might have foreseen all this misery and prevented it, but alas!”

“Let by-gones be by-gones; you have nothing to upbraid yourself with, I feel sure of that. Lydia.”

“I was not conscious of doing wrong at the time. but we are often sufferers from our own blindness. and the only way I can possibly atone to my father for what I have done, is by reconciling him to the marriage. A hard task lies before me, and I tremble when I think of my own weakness; you must pray

for me, dear Miss Massing, I know my cause is a good one, and I will struggle on, hoping to the end." A fit of coughing prevented her speaking for some moments, and it sounded to herself as a call from the grave.

"You should not have come out to-day with your cough, it was wrong of you," said Miss Massing, looking sorrowfully at her.

"I had my muzzle on," said she, laughing. "I always think myself at liberty to walk anywhere, when I have it over my mouth."

"Do you, then, wear a respirator?"

"Yes, I have this winter, and I find it a great comfort, for you know my chest is weak."

"You never told me that, Lydia. It is not in the family, I hope? you must take great care."

"My mother's sister died of consumption," said Lydia, very gravely. "I sometimes think I have inherited that complaint."

"You frighten me; pray do not speak of such things."

"But if it were to prove a reality, would it be so very sad?"

"We should lose you," was all Miss Massing could say, and the tears again started to her sympathising eye.

"But it might be the best for us all. My death might do more good than my life; dying words are long remembered; a last request seldom falls on dull ears. You can imagine what I mean. Do

not let us pray that such an occurrence may not take place, but that I may be prepared to meet an early death, and that in dying I may do good."

"It must not be; you are always doing good, The poor could never lose a greater friend than you have always been to them, from your earliest childhood. I can remember you years ago, when I first came to Brimelsea; it was the same thing then, only of course in a different way. I have not forgotten your giving your dinner to the beggar woman, and going without any pudding because you thought poor Nanny Merton, who was laid up with a broken arm, would like it."

"It gave me pleasure to do that, I exercised no self-denial, so you must not praise me; and, indeed, I am far from good, you have a much better opinion of me than I deserve. I am afraid it is very presumptuous of me, but I sometimes fancy it would be easier to have borne death in the times of persecution, than to struggle with lesser trials in the cause of religion; there is so much that flatters the imagination and pride in dying for one's faith, but the petty self-denials of every-day life offer no earthly lure. It is harder to crucify the mind, than the flesh."

"I cannot quite agree with you, Lydia. I am such a poor, weak body, I should never have had strength sufficient to die for my religion. Thank heaven, I was not born in the days when all true believers might be called on to do so."

"I see you think me presumptuous," said Lydia.

"No, people are happily not alike. Some are strong in faith, some weak; some are adherents to religion only in times of peace, and fall away when danger comes near them, whilst some again are always true. These last are often the most sorely tried, but then their reward will be the greater in heaven. You, Lydia, have had much to bear, and have acted throughout blamelessly: there are many good intentioned people who would envy your opportunities of action, and yet who would never have fulfilled that position as you have. We are all tried according to our powers, each day shows us that more plainly."

"You must not flatter me, Miss Massing. Vanity is my besetting sin."

The door opened as she said this, and Maud entered hurriedly. "Blanche has come with Mademoiselle Lafoure, Mr. Holford, and Captain Macklaren," a slight blush overspread her face as she mentioned the last name, "and they want me to walk with them on the beach. I have half promised to go, may I?"

"Take care of the tide; we must not have such an adventure as that over again; it has given Lydia a dreadful cough," said Miss Massing.

"There is no fear at all to-day; besides, we will not venture so far. I may go, may I not?"

Miss Massing immediately assented, and after

apologising to Lydia for running away so soon, Maud left the room to prepare for her walk.

"I hope she will take care of herself, and not run any risk," continued the anxious Miss Massing, looking as if she would much like to follow her niece, and act guardian over her safety. "I always feel nervous now, when I lose sight of Maud, particularly when she goes to the beach."

"I do not think there is any occasion for fear. Such adventures do not happen twice in a lifetime, and Maud has bought her experience somewhat dearly. What ages it seems to me have passed over our heads since that memorable day—it was like the forerunner of evil. Far rather would I endure the fear of that raging sea again, than go through all the suffering I have since had to bear."

"There are few people who can look on death as fearlessly as you."

"It is not exactly death one thinks of in such moments as those; there is an overwhelming dread of something, but I am sure it was not of death—at least, in my case, it was entirely undefined. I was quite unable to think at all."

"Yet I was told you had the most presence of mind of the party," said Miss Massing.

"Some one who wished to flatter me, told you that—I did nothing that could justify such praise. Presence of mind is a gift I have always envied; a person who possesses it must have a strong

character and great determination ; I am afraid I have neither the one nor the other."

"Whether you have or no, there is one inestimable gift you possess, and that is, a great deal of spirit. I should be crushed by half the sorrow you have gone through, and, in spite of it all, you can smile as brightly as you used, long ago, before any serious trouble fell on your head."

Lydia looked at her friend, and said, softly, "I think, if we have taught ourselves to open our hearts to the sorrows of others, to share with them their grief, and have striven all our lives to sympathise and comfort the afflicted, we do not feel the burden of sorrow so much when it falls on ourselves, but are, as it were, prepared to meet it, and we all must suffer in this world."

Miss Massing brushed the tears away, that had forced themselves, against her intention, from her eye, and said, gently—

"Yes, I have seen a great deal of sorrow in my life, but it has been a very happy one on the whole. I have been highly blessed—good parents, kind friends, and many, many enjoyments."

"Life could not fail to be bright to such as you," and Lydia stooped down and kissed her fondly.

Maud was not long preparing for her walk, and soon joined the rest of the party, who were walk-

ing up and down before the Boarding House, waiting for her.

“None the worse for our boating yesterday, I hope, Maud,” said Blanche, shaking her warmly by the hand. “Mr. Holford has been kind enough to introduce Captain Macklaren to us, and he has promised to be of our party to-morrow. I hope he is prepared to see a most superior performance in the way of charades,” and Blanche turned to look at him.

“Being a bad actor myself, I could not criticise,” said he, abstractedly.

“Miss Erving takes a very prominent part,” suggested Mr. Holford, “and acts as if it were her profession.”

Maud bit her lip; she was vexed with him, for there was a certain twinkle in his eye she did not like, and he seemed to have some understanding with his friend, for Captain Macklaren frowned slightly, as if to prevent his saying any more. Maud was puzzled as to what their looks could mean, and putting her arm within Blanche’s, she led her forward, and took no more notice of the gentlemen, who were soon engaged in a dispute with Mademoiselle Lafoure upon politics.

Captain Macklaren was a tory of the olden time, Mr. Holford had no very decided opinions, and Mademoiselle Lafoure was republican in her views. She considered Louis Napoleon the worst enemy to his country; called him upstart and villain, whilst

she extolled the virtues of Lamartine, and mourned over the early death of the republic. She had studied English politics, was fond of reading the newspapers, and formed very vague ideas as to the proceedings of parliament, and the characters of public men. Lord Palmerston was, in her opinion, all that was bad, and when she spoke of the state of England, she shook her head gravely, as if she thought it fast falling to the ground.

"Poor England, its sun has set!" she said; "ever since the time of Cromwell, England's glory has been declining."

"If that is the case, I must confess we have gone down very imperceptibly," said Mr. Holford, smiling.

"Ah, you English see things through very partial eyes; we are the best judges, for we can look on from a distance, without being touched with any feeling save pity."

"Might you not add, save envy? It is impossible for us poor human creatures, full of failings as we are, not to look with a jealous eye on all that is not belonging to us," said Mr. Holford, gravely. "We like to pull our neighbours to pieces, how much more then, do we love to magnify the faults of nations that may be greater than our own; we cannot help feeling envious, and however charitable the individual, there is always a certain national pride, which often leads us into the commission of the petty sin of spite."

“Ah, you English gentlemen are so narrow-minded, you cannot understand anything beyond the limits of your island; the great continent, with all its striving souls, might sink from sight altogether, and you would not mind, you would not even turn to see what was going on, but would pride yourselves on being safe on English ground. Take care, it is shaking under your feet,” and Mademoiselle Lafoure shook her parasol, as if to represent the condition of England.

“And what is France doing?” demanded Mr. Holford.

She turned up her hands and eyes: “*Ma foi!* do not ask me. My dear country labours under the iron rule of a tyrant; may he meet the doom he well deserves; it could be no crime to murder the man who never scrupled to commit wholesale murder on the sons of France. I should like to have him here in my power—ah, *cet homme*, he is not fit to live!”

“Your judgment is surely harsh; he has done much good to his country,” said Captain Macklaren.

“Good! Where can we find it? You are joking, Monsieur; no one can think Napoleon has done good. See how he raised himself to the throne; was it through fair means? No; a thousand times I would answer, no! He is false, ambitious, and vile; to think of him makes me blush for my country. But Frenchmen will rise, they will not

suffer themselves long to be ruled by such a man ; he has not even the bravery of his uncle, which alone could make his name resound to his honour. You English admire him because he is a king ; you would bow your heads before any one that had rank ; I laugh at your weakness, as the continent laughs at you. A time will come, when your eyes will be opened, and you will find Napoleon an enemy, not a friend. Remember, Waterloo has to be avenged."

" You expect war, then, Mademoiselle Lafoure ; you do not, I hope, wish for it ?"

" Waterloo has to be avenged," she repeated, coldly turning her head from them, and looking towards the sea ; then suddenly stopping, she said gaily, " How serious we have become ; we must not talk of politics, we do not agree, and I should be sorry to quarrel, so let us change our theme. Blanche, dear, and Maud, do you intend walking together all the time ?"

" Certainly not," replied the former ; " but you appeared so engrossed in your political dispute, that, in self-defence, Maud and I have been amusing ourselves in front. Will you promise not to talk politics any more ?"

" Yes, if you will answer one question before we leave the topic. What are your views, Miss Farn-court ?" asked Mr. Holford.

" I ?" said Blanche ; " oh, anything that is most convenient ; I know nothing about the matter, and

care less, so long as I am in a comfortable position myself."

"What a selfish view, Blanche; that is not like you at all," said Maud.

"It must be like me, as I tell the truth—I really mean what I say; but now that I have answered Mr. Holford's question, we will drop the topic, politics are such a dull, unsatisfactory theme, they always make people angry, and the more they talk the more exaggerated their opinions become."

Thus they chatted on, Blanche walking fast with the two gentlemen, and Maud lingering behind with her old school-mistress. She had never been so great a favourite with her as Blanche but Mademoiselle Lafoure loved all her pupils, and though she had left their religious training very much to chance, she had had, throughout, most amiable, engaging girls to instruct, and her school was much liked, both by pupils and parents.

"Can you tell me anything about that Mr. Holford?" asked Mademoiselle Lafoure of Maud, when they were sufficiently far out of hearing.

"Not much; he is a man of good family, and the next heir to a very extensive property."

"Indeed; and where is his family now?"

"That I cannot say; he is staying at Lady Macklaren's, just now."

"He seems to have taken a great fancy to Blanche. I was anxious to know about him on

that account. Lord Reynoldforde does not think of these things, and poor Blanche has to endure the society of people she would never have met with in her mother's lifetime."

"I was not aware of that; I suppose you allude to the Marquis de Montanvert," said Maud, gravely.

"Yes, a very designing man, and if report says true, he is far from being a fit person for a father to introduce to a daughter. Poor Blanche! she feels the loss of a mother most deeply."

"Can you not protect her from this Marquis?" asked Maud. "She seems to dislike him very much; surely if you were to represent what sort of a man he is, Lord Reynoldforde would never let him enter the house again."

"Ah, Miss Erving, you are very good, but you do not know men's characters. I should only get the credit for being a meddler in what did not concern me. No, things must take their course; Blanche has plenty of determination, and is, I am happy to say, well principled; I can trust her to act rightly towards every one. She knows more of this Marquis than she chooses to confess, I am sure of that."

"Do you think he is in love with her?" asked Maud, eagerly.

"No, there is no appearance of it, and I am a good judge in such matters; besides, he is old enough to be her father, no one could ever suspect

him of that. The Marquis was at school with Lord Reynoldforde, and a sad, wild life they led in Paris afterwards, just before the latter married. I can remember Lady Reynoldforde very well; she was so exquisitely beautiful, that every one raved about her in Paris; she was reported to be going to marry several people, and, amongst others, the Marquis de Montanvert; they were seen a great deal together, and many people would not believe that she was engaged to Lord Reynoldforde instead. Poor thing! it was a bold act to marry such a gay young man as he was. They left Paris almost directly after the wedding, and went to live on his estate; I knew nothing more after that, till Blanche was sent to me to be educated."

"And do you believe that the Marquis still continues his gay life?" asked Maud.

"Nay, I know nothing of his subsequent history. I only fear it, and am anxious to see he does not act towards Blanche and her father in a way that might be detrimental to both."

"You puzzle me, Mademoiselle. Is there really cause to fear him?"

"I only suspect that his friendship is not sincere, and knowing the great influence he has over Lord Reynoldforde, I am anxious lest he should lead him back into his old habits. Something in Blanche's manner makes me think she has the same fear I have, but she never mentions the

subject, which is natural when it so nearly concerns her father."

"Poor Blanche!" exclaimed Maud, and her thoughts recurred to the interview she had had with her alone in her cabin.

"Lord Reynoldforde is very weak," continued Mademoiselle Lafoure. "He used to gamble in Paris, but his wife, I am told, weaned him from that dreadful vice. The Marquis is, I believe, an exile; but I have never heard the exact reason of his quitting Paris—it may have been from some other cause less noble than that of fighting for freedom. I do not think he ever was brave."

"You seem to entertain a very bad opinion of him. I quite tremble for Blanche; it must be a hard trial to treat a man you detest and despise as a friend, and to see his influence daily increasing upon her father; yet she does not appear to feel it much—she is as cheerful as she used to be."

"To outward appearance—but I doubt if it comes from the heart—people may sometimes smile mechanically. I think, from the little I have yet seen, that Blanche is greatly changed—there is a morbid feeling of dislike to the world, which she never had when a child; her entrance into life seems to have given her the impression that all is false; she must have met with disappointment, though I do not know in what shape it has presented itself to her."

"Is not that Lord Reynoldforde and the Mar-

quis?" said Maud, pointing to two figures in the distance. "It is very like the latter."

"There is no doubt about it. I could never mistake the Marquis; there is something mysterious in his very walk, and I always know my countrymen."

A few minutes had scarcely elapsed before they were joined by the last-mentioned gentlemen.

"Glad to see you, Holford; we want to consult you about the charade dresses," said Lord Reynoldforde. "The Marquis and I have decided that the end of the saloon could easily be turned into a very passable stage; but the dresses puzzle me. What is to be done?"

"Why not act in our ordinary dresses?" asked Blanche. "The pieces we have selected are only scenes from every-day life."

There were some doubts as to whether this would be considered effective enough; but the Marquis gave his vote in favour of Blanche's proposal, and it was finally agreed upon.

"This being the case, there will be very little preparation needed," said Lord Reynoldforde. "And there can be no doubt as to our being fully prepared by to-morrow evening. We have sent the carpenters on board with full directions, and I hope they are hard at work now."

"Must not we have another rehearsal?" asked Maud. "I begin to dread having to act."

"You can repeat your part before Miss Mas-

sing," said Blanche. "I intend to rehearse before Mademoiselle Lafoure this evening, if she will be so kind as to listen to my ravings."

"Where is Captain Bissenthorpe?" asked Lord Reynoldforde. "Have you seen him this morning, Holford?"

"No, he was on duty when I went to the barracks, but he is sure to be on the parade this afternoon."

"I have asked him to bring as many of the officers as like to come, and I hope, Miss Erving, you will prevail on your aunt to be of the party to-morrow. Should you have any other friends in Brimelsea who would think it worth their while to be present at such a scene, I hope you will bring them. Blanche and I can promise to do our best to entertain them well."

Maud thanked Lord Reynoldforde warmly, said she was sure her aunt would be delighted to be of the party, but that she knew no people in the town to ask.

"Would not the Polish Count enjoy seeing you act?" asked Blanche with a smile.

"Ah, a very good-looking fellow," said Lord Reynoldforde, not hearing the last part of the sentence. "Pray bring him with you, I should like to be introduced. A Pole, is he, Blanche?"

"Nay, do not appeal to me; Maud is the best acquainted with his history."

"I know very little about him, I assure you,

farther than that he arrived at Brimelsea in the same train as myself, and has since resided at the Boarding House. He seems to have no profession, but is an exile from his country."

"But his name? As he is to be my guest, I have a right to know his name," persisted Lord Reynoldforde.

"Count Porskinski," said Maud, smiling. "It is not hard to pronounce, which is more than can be said for most German names."

"I do not agree—Porskinski—it is harsh enough, at all events. Can you master it, Montanvert?"

The Marquis shrugged his shoulders, and did not attempt the hard lesson. "I shall find difficulties enough to-morrow to master the eccentricities of your language. Pray do not task my powers of speech too severely. This Polish gentleman will, I have no doubt, be able to speak French—it is the polite language of Germany."

"It used to be," said Maud, hastily, "but I am happy to say the Germans know how to appreciate their own language now."

Captain Macklaren looked at her, and their eyes met. Maud let hers drop, and a slight blush overspread her face—caused, *perhaps*, by excitement.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A STRANGE QUARREL.

THE charades were over on board the "Firefly," and it was floating at anchor half a mile from the entrance of the harbour; flags were flying, and coloured lamps illumined the rigging; the sound of music came softly over the water, and figures were seen flitting round and round in the merry dance.

"I am so tired!" exclaimed Blanche, as she threw herself upon a bench, after a rapid gallop with the Marquis de Montanvert.

"You dance so beautifully, I wonder you should ever tire," said he, fixing his dark eyes on her.

"You must wonder no more, then, for I am really tired," continued Blanche, carelessly.

"We must take into consideration your exertions this evening; when people act as well as you do, they cannot fail to be exhausted with the exertion, for good acting calls forth all the powers, both mental and bodily."

“How beautifully Mr. Holford performed his part!” said Blanche, half speaking to herself.

“He is clever in comedy, but has not sufficient mind for tragedy,” rejoined the other. “Miss Erving acts with a great amount of *esprit*, but the whole thing would have fallen to the ground if it had not been for you; the tragic scene in which you took so prominent a part was perfect; it is a pity your extraordinary talent should have so little scope. I never saw a more finished tragic actress. You would create quite a furore in Paris.”

“Then you think tragedy is not called forth in real life,” said Blanche, leaning over the side of the vessel, and watching the bright reflection of the moon in the water.

“Alas! too often,” replied the Marquis, and his voice was low and full of meaning.

“I like tragedy,” continued Blanche. “It fills one with new life, and this world would be tame without it. Who is that man standing near us?” added she, pointing to a dark figure in the shade, who was watching the dancers. “He cannot be one of the sailors; I have never seen his face before.”

“He is the new mate. Captain Macklaren introduced him, and he came on board this morning.”

“What is his name?” again demanded Blanche.

“Like all your English sailors—his name is

Jack. I have not learned the other yet, but it sounded something like Catton."

"Oh," said Blanche, "he is well recommended. I like his countenance; we must be friends," and she made a movement towards Jack.

"Will you not finish this galop with me?" asked the Marquis, looking up beseechingly into her face.

"Thank you, no; if you will excuse me I shall be much obliged. There is Mademoiselle Lafoure in want of a partner, she dances like a second Madame Michau."

"Who would prefer the old to the young?"

Blanche turned for a moment to look at him. There was the same expression on his face that she had seen there once before, when the lightning had revealed it to her; a pang of fear shot through her frame, and she hastened away.

"Beautiful woman!" murmured the Marquis to himself. "You shall accept the hand your mother refused; and in doing so, you shall become the instrument to wreak my vengeance on your father."

Blanche did not speak to Jack, as she had first intended doing, but seeing that Maud was standing alone she joined her, and they were soon engaged in an earnest conversation.

"You make me unhappy, Blanche," said her friend.

"Why should that be? I'm as gay as a lark to-night."

"It is that which makes me unhappy, for I doubt its being natural, you speak so despondingly at times ; and then you break off into the wildest merriment, laughing and talking even with the man you say you hate, and have every reason to despise."

"I do so partly because he is my father's friend, and partly because I wish to show him I do not fear him."

"Is there no fear of your doing mischief by this conduct? Would it not be better for you to speak openly to your father, if indeed you have good grounds for this suspicion?"

"Dear Maud, what I do must remain a secret to you. I dare not ask your advice. I have no right to disclose anything concerning my father, and, without doing so, I cannot speak openly with you. Let me still, however, entreat you to think I act from motives I hope and believe to be right, and judge your school friend as lightly now as in the days when I took your penknife and gave it to little Maggie, who was crying because she had lost hers."

Blanche laughed as she said this, and putting her hand playfully on Maud's mouth, to prevent her saying anything, she continued in a gay tone,

"What do you think of your last partner, Captain Bissenthorpe, Maud?"

"Oh, I liked him very much. I think he is a nice person, do not you?"

"Nice? That depends upon what you call nice. He is a poor simple creature, who understands how to utter the usual amount of compliments, although, I am sure, he never originated one. I can make him do anything I like."

"That is saying a great deal, Blanche, but you must not be angry with me if I doubt your power of performing what you say."

"You shall see, I intend to prove my words; let us settle what we will make him do—what is he most proud of?"

"Nay, how can I tell? You had better inquire of himself."

"That would spoil all; besides, there never was a conceited man who would allow vanity was his peculiar fault. How could you suppose such a thing, Maud? Let me see, I ought to know what would be the hardest trial; he is very proud of his feet, but we cannot ask him to do anything with them. No; but his whiskers, I am sure he delights in them. I will make him cut them off—that will be a bitter struggle—but he shall do it."

"What nonsense, Blanche, I wonder you can be so childish; this is not worthy of you now."

"I do not agree with you; men often treat us as if they thought we were children—at least, that our intellects were no brighter—so we may be allowed to pay them back in their own coin."

"And show them that we are children!"

"Amuse ourselves at their expense, that is all I

want to do. They often play us false, and you may be very sure I would not act heartlessly if I really thought I should give pain."

"Perhaps Captain Bissenthorpe has more feeling than you give him credit for, and if you succeed in your wild project, I shall certainly respect him, and nothing will persuade me he is not in love with you."

"With me?" ejaculated Blanche, and her lip curled scornfully; "with my money you mean, Maud. But here comes our sentimental hero, he looks as if he were pining, does he not? Take care of that Polish Count, Maud," she added in a whisper, "he has been watching you all the evening, and looks daggers at Captain Macklaren; what have you been doing to him?"

The next instant she was whirling off with Captain Bissenthorpe, watching an opportunity to put her designs in execution.

Count Porskinski had gladly accepted Lord Reynoldforde's invitation to join the yacht party. He had seen Maud act her part with rapture, and felt jealous of every one else who applauded her; anxious to be the first to congratulate her in person, at the close of the performance, he hastened towards her, but Captain Macklaren stepped in before him, and he turned away, too proud to second his rival's praise.

Dancing began; Count Porskinski asked her hand for the waltz that was just beginning. She

smiled, and said she was engaged, and he saw her led off by Captain Macklaren. How he hated that man in his heart. Silent and sullen he leaned against the side of the vessel, and watched her flying before him; he asked himself why he felt so depressed, and his heart answered that he loved her. Did she care for him, however? That he could not tell, but he looked upon Macklaren as one who stood between him and happiness.

“He, too, loves her,” he thought; “he is even now trying to gain her affections from me. I must act at once; if I delay longer, my chance will be lost. She shall listen to my history, and pity for the exile will make her soften, and turn to rescue the unfortunate. I will write to her this very night, and tell her all, from the time when I was a little child, and loved my sister with a love as pure as that she now inspires in me. Ah!” he exclaimed aloud, and with an involuntary start, as if he wished to clench something, or dart forward, but he refrained, and sank back upon the seat near him.

The dance had ceased, Maud was seated, and Captain Macklaren leaned over her; it was this that had caused Count Porskinski to start and frown.

“He whispers to her,” he murmured within himself; “his words are poison; he shall die; to-morrow morning, before the sun shines on the world,

either he or I shall have found our grave. May it be my fate, if she really does not love me."

"You must not censure her to me, Captain Macklaren, we have been friends from childhood, and if she appears thoughtless, she is not so in reality. Blanche was always high-spirited, but she is full of soul; you do not know her; you cannot judge from what she seems to be." These were the words which caused Count Porskinski a pang of jealousy, for in giving utterance to them Maud had looked eagerly into her partner's face, and enthusiasm animated her whole countenance.

"They seem very fond of each other," said Miss Massing to Lady Macklaren, as she sat watching her niece.

"I am glad of it. I could not wish Roger to have a better wife; she has plenty of steadiness of character, and my boy would make her an excellent husband."

"I am quite sure of that," said kind Miss Massing, taking the fond mother's hand; "he is so like you, I could wish for no better recommendation; you know how I admire all that belongs to you, and how very dear he is to me for your sake."

"Thank you," said Lady Macklaren, softly. "Roger deserves to be liked, he has been my greatest blessing."

"And you can give him up, can see another image growing in his heart besides yours, and with-

out a sigh?" said Miss Massing, looking admiringly into her friend's face.

"Not without a sigh," rejoined the other, "but it is for his happiness; he wants a companion of his own age. I have lived for him, but my time must now be short; he will need a comforter, some one who will take my place in his heart, and make him miss me less. I shall like to see her leaning on his arm, and, perhaps, the pleasure of watching the growth of a young blossom may still be mine. You see I am very selfish; we always seek to mingle our own pleasure in our good wishes for others, and though we seem disinterested, we are not so at heart."

"I wish I were as *selfish* as you," said Miss Massing, brushing a bright tear from her eye; "but they say old maids always think of number one; I fear it is the case with me."

"Will you not consent to dance this quadrille, Miss Massing?" said Lord Reynoldforde, approaching them.

"No, thank you, my dancing days are over. Wallflowers must be content to sit and look on," said she, smiling.

"And yet wallflowers are the brightest gems of our gardens," continued the nobleman.

"But only in their proper place," suggested Lady Macklaren, laughing.

It was late when the order to return to shore was given, and the "Firefly" moved smoothly

towards the harbour. Maud had seated herself beside her aunt, and Blanche was talking gaily to all around.

"A most enjoyable evening this has been," said Miss Massing. "I am sure we are greatly indebted to Lord Reynoldforde; Brimelsea has been quite a different place since the 'Firefly' took up its abode in the harbour."

"I hope to give Miss Massing greater reason to say so before long," said Lord Reynoldforde, bowing, "and I trust, that having once ventured on board, it will not be the last time we shall have the pleasure of seeing you here. Blanche, my dear, do you think we can persuade Miss Massing, and your friend, Miss Erving, to accompany us on our long cruise?"

"Nay, I must leave it to you, papa, to persuade the ladies, you will have more weight than I with them. Maud knows how delighted I should be to have her."

"What does this mean?" asked Miss Massing.

"We are going to take an excursion of some days," said Lord Reynoldforde, "and as a pleasant party adds so much to the pleasure of a trip, we are anxious to engage our friends in time. What do you say to it, Miss Massing?"

"You are very kind, but really you must not include Maud and myself in your list; I could not let her be absent from me so long, and it would be perfectly impossible for me to accept your invitation."

"I am very sorry, indeed; but cannot we over-persuade you, if there is no real reason for your refusal?"

"No, thank you, it must not be. Maud has been put under my care by her guardian, and if she were to come to any harm whilst with me, I should never forgive myself; you must not think of us any more, indeed you must not."

"Well, as you are so determined, we must submit; perhaps another day we shall be more successful, and, as we cannot start this week, there is time enough to think about it."

"I must not change my mind, must I, Maud?"

"You know best, aunt Lucy," replied her niece, in a slight tone of disappointment.

"We shall yet win the day," cried Lord Reynoldforde, laughing at the change in Miss Massing's expression, when she saw that her niece really wished for her consent.

"Captain Macklaren," continued Lord Reynoldforde, "we may at least reckon upon you."

"No, thank you, I must not leave home at present, for I have only just returned; a long absence makes one sing 'Home, sweet home,' when once we feel its influence again."

"If you really wish to go very much, Maud, dear, we might....."

Miss Massing was instantly interrupted by her niece, who said, hurriedly, "I wish it most certainly, but I do not think it would be good for me, nor

would it be right. Lord Reynoldforde is very kind, but I, too, must refuse, against my inclination."

"Now that is really too bad, Miss Erving, I did hope to have an advocate in you," said Lord Reynoldforde, reproachfully.

Lady Macklaren complained of feeling cold, and her son went to bring another shawl from the cabin for her. As he was returning, however, a dark figure encountered him, and brushed rudely past; without thinking who was in fault, Captain Macklaren turned and begged the stranger's pardon.

"Sir, I do not accept it," said a voice in a foreign accent. It was Count Porskinski's.

"I am at a loss to know your meaning," said the other, in great astonishment.

"I said I do not accept your apology, and wish for satisfaction in another and more honourable way."

"This is all very incomprehensible; may I ask what I have done?"

"Done, sir! you have acted in an ungentlemanly manner towards me. I am unacquainted with your English customs, but when we seek for satisfaction we receive it."

"I could never fight a man for whom I felt no animosity, and if I have given you reason to complain of me, I hope you will permit me to say it was wholly unintentional." Captain Macklaren stretched out his hand, but it was not taken.

"You have sought to ruin me, and you still do

so in your heart ; how can I forgive a man who is so base ?”

“ This language is wholly unbecoming a man of honour.”

“ I wish it to be so ; I long to expiate my fault with my sword ; I wish to give you satisfaction, and if you are not a coward, you will accept my challenge.”

“ I bear you no ill-will, and believe that all this has arisen from a mistake, and to show how far I am from cherishing any detrimental feeling to you, I offer now to serve you in any way I can.”

“ The greatest service you can do me, is to consent to act as a man of courage, and meet me in some retired place, to-morrow, before sunrise ; we must not be interrupted ; I fight for life and death.”

“ These are dangerous words,” said Captain Macklaren, “ and would be considered unpardonable in an Englishman, but in a foreigner we must make allowances for difference in opinion and manners. Let this strange conference be brought to a speedy conclusion, it must be painful to both of us. You have mistaken me for some one else ; I have scarcely the pleasure of your acquaintance.”

“ My eyes do not deceive me ; the insult you offer me every moment is deep, it touches the heart, through a third person, whose honoured name I will not even breathe.”

“ I have a right to know to whom you allude,” said Captain Macklaren, reddening.

“ I speak of a lady, as fair as the sky above our heads ; you know whom I mean.”

“ I do, and I guess your suspicions,” said the other, slowly.

“ Do you still refuse to fight ?” asked the Count, approaching, and gazing eagerly into his adversary’s face.

“ Yes, I do refuse ; the subject over which you wish to fight can be arranged without such severe measures.”

“ You think she is not worthy to be striven for ?”

“ I think no honour too great for her.”

“ Ah !” exclaimed the Count, stamping his foot on the deck.

“ Hear me out—ladies in England are free to choose their husbands ; to fight me would not bring you an inch nearer the lady on whom you have placed your affections. Let me teach you to look on the matter in another light. Put me entirely out of the question ; you are in daily intercourse with—the name I need not mention—seek her hand openly ; if she loves you she will accept you, and never turn a thought on me ; if not, who but the lady herself could decide such a question ?”

“ You speak in a slighting manner of the most important thing in life,” said Count Porskinski. “ You could not do so were you in love with the lady of whom we speak. I take your hand, believing this to be the case ; I will follow your ad-

vice, though the manner in which you offered it was cold and heartless. I thought I hated you five minutes ago—I mistook dislike for hate—but I do so now.”

“Poor fellow! he is mad,” thought Captain Macklaren. “He little knows how deeply I love Maud Erving; his imagination is struck by her beauty; he loves her as all foreigners do—wildly for the moment—but it soon fades. She does not care for him; he will soon forget her, at least I hope so.” It was with thoughts like these that he again offered his hand to his adversary, and this time it was taken.

“We part friends, do we not?” said Captain Macklaren.

“If you like to call it so, you may, though I cannot. The word friend is dear to me; it should not be applied lightly; I see visions of confidence, trust, and reliance. I could never place these in you, we differ as widely as our nations are apart—the world of dreams is mine, the world of practice yours—go, mingle with it and prosper; I will forget you, and, in forgetting, I will not hate.”

The Count drew himself up as he uttered this speech, and his figure seemed almost gigantic in the half light. Captain Macklaren looked up and admired him. Who does not admire secretly the mystery they cannot unravel? Count Porskinski was a deep mystery to the open-hearted sailor; there was nothing concealed in his own breast; he

could not, therefore, understand it in others, and the strange voice and manner of speech had at least the charm of novelty to him, though it did not excite that admiration it would have done in more imaginative minds than his.

There is a melancholy pleasure in looking back on days past for ever ; the forms then so familiar rise up like ghosts before us, repeating long-forgotten words, in voices whose accents we once listened to with joy, but which the oblivion of intervening years has drowned within our hearts till the magic wand of memory has brought them to our ears again.

Count Porskinski sat in his bedroom all that night, and his pen moved rapidly over the paper lying upon the desk before him. He seldom paused, and when he did it was to brush a tear from his eye, or to gaze out into the clear night, as if to refresh the boundless range of his thoughts from its kindred eternity of space. A gleam of happiness would spread itself at times over his wan countenance, but it soon faded, and an all-pervading melancholy took its place.

The manuscript was finished ; the light of day streamed in upon him ; he rose with a sigh ; his story was told ; he was once more living in the present, and, like the shades of night, the past faded before the bright rays of the rising sun ; fain would he have called it back again, but it was gone.

The packet was soon sealed carefully, and, putting it by in a safe drawer, he did not touch it again till evening had come; he then took it from its hiding-place, pressed it to his lips, as if loath to part with the record of his joys and sorrows, and gave it to Laurette to put into her mistress's hands so soon as she should retire for the night.

The Frenchwoman was pleased at having to perform such an office, and did her part as she was desired. Let us intrude upon Maud's privacy, and witness the fate of our sealed packet—its contents we have still to learn.

Maud wondered what the carefully-fastened letter could contain, but she did not attempt to open it till left alone in her room that night, then drawing the candle close to her, she broke the string that bound it together, and with eager curiosity unfolded a neatly-written manuscript—it was several pages long. She seated herself in her arm-chair, cast her eye rapidly over the whole, and then turned to begin in earnest; a bright blush burned on her cheek, and there was a lustre in her eye which showed how deeply she was interested, and well she might be, for the story was a stirring one, written from the heart, with all the warmth of expression for which the Germans are so famed. Maud dwelt on each word, each line; but we shall be better able to understand what was passing in her mind if we, too, follow her example, and turn to the commencement of Count Porskinski's story

—for it was the true story of his life—and for the benefit of our readers, we will here translate it from the original German, though, doubtless, it will lose in pathos by the change to a colder tongue.

A STORY.

Each life has its secret. We are all influenced by some opinion, thought, or circumstance, which directs, though invisibly, the course of our whole lives, either for good or bad. We can rarely discover the secret ourselves, except when looking back on a long retrospect of years, throughout which this influence can be clearly traced. Still, some lives are so intricate, that not even the most clever philosopher could unravel their mystery. Mine has been one of these, and though the weight of years cannot yet be said to oppress me, still the weight of disappointment crushes me to the ground. I am almost a stranger to you, Miss Erving. Pardon me, then, if in seeking to interest, I thus intrude upon you the story of my life, and right blessed will be the moment to me if, in leading you through the mazes of my inner life, the recital should cause a tear of sympathy to start to your eye. Be patient with me, read to the end, and if my manuscript should displease you, burn it; never let it see the light of day again, but oh! as you love peace of mind and happiness inexpressible, judge not too harshly, and let the light of

pity shine on me from your eyes when next we meet again.

In Poland, far away from where your lot is cast, in the land where freedom is a dream, to which the most ardent youth could scarce hope to aspire, there lived two happy children—a brother and sister—and their laughing voices were heard to ring in merry concert the live-long day, for their early life was past amid roses, and the world lay hid from them, veiled in the gorgeous mystery of youthful dreams, whilst shadows only of the dark reality were but faintly mirrored on the peaceful present of their lives. Well might they be happy, and dream that all was bright; who would not wish the days of childhood back again?

No restraint fettered their movements or their thoughts, they grew together like the wild flowers, and like them they were innocent and pure. Many were their rambles amongst the meadows and pastures, many the garlands and wreaths they plucked; all around was bright. How could they, then, but believe that life yet to come would prove as happy as the present, or doubt that the long perspective of their dreamy future would be peopled by those they loved most dearly. Alas! how soon did such joyous visions vanish! Like the lily she resembled, Elsa, my fairy sister, faded ere the scorching rays of life's sun burned her fair brow. I loved her with all the fervour of a young heart, and it was with a pang of deepest agony that I

learned *she* could die. I had seen a bird fall dead ; I had been told that it, too, was the fate of mortals, but that she, my own sister, who breathed so freely, was so full of life and hope, to think that she could die ! Oh no, that was too hard, it could not be ; yet so it was, and I have since learned to bless the moment that saw her breathe that last long sigh, and cross her pale hands in the deep, motionless sleep of death. Oh, Elsa ! what bitter, lonely hours I have spent since you were with me ! I never wished you back again—this life is too rough for one so tender—it was well you died amid the roses, and never woke to see the thorns beneath their soft covering, which was all that ever greeted your light footstep.

With Elsa the dreams of my youth fled for ever, the veil of fancy fell from my eyes, and the world stood out cold and dreary ; it was the same it had ever been, but I was changed.

Our country life was now broken up ; I was sent to Warsaw to be educated, under the care of an uncle—one of the most excellent men that ever breathed—and I may safely say the year I spent beneath his roof was one of the most peaceful, if not the happiest of my life ; but, alas ! he died, and I was placed at a large school in the town. It was here that my eyes were first opened to the degradation of my country ; I read its history, and my blood boiled with enthusiasm. Most of my comrades shared my views, and often, when

free from the restraint of our master's presence, we would enact scenes of rebellion, and plan deeper designs for the future.

I grew up; was forced to join the Russian army; to fight for the tyrants I abhorred; it was a bitter struggle, but I yielded to a mother's prayers. I felt as if I had degraded myself in taking this step; my conscience smote me every night; I dreamt of perfidy, escape, and revenge, and would start up from my weary couch with a burning cheek and throbbing head. Each day made me detest the yoke that bound me more and more; I saw the tyranny exercised upon my unfortunate countrymen, and blushed to think I was, as it were, an instrument to keep them in subjection. I never raised a word in praise of the Emperor; I cursed him when they drank his health; my demeanour did not pass unremarked; I was laughed at for a patriotism I dared not confess.

Oh, bitter were those days; no wonder that goaded and enraged, I broke my bonds, and, in seeking revenge, found an exile's lot my portion, and the mountain districts of Tyrol my refuge. Often when alone, upon some hunting excursion, have I stood and watched the mist rise from the valley higher and higher till its insidious breath touched me, and I have almost started when my own imagination has pictured Elsa's child-like form standing gazing at me from the vacancy in front. I would stretch out my hand involuntarily

to her, and the vision would fly, leaving nought but disappointment behind.

There is no peace for an exile's foot ; I wearied of those mountain fastnesses and fled to Italy, but here suspicion found me. Austria looks with a jealous eye upon the lovers of freedom, and I quitted Lombardy and sought employment and distraction first in Rome, then in Paris, and since that time in London.

Many eventful years have rolled over my head ; I am old in experience, but yet not old ; I am but thirty-two, and ten years of my life alone have been spent in my native country amidst my friends. You, who are surrounded by so many loving hearts, can scarcely imagine the misery of entire separation ; they say time accustoms us to everything—it has not been so with me. I could not bear to see the social happiness of the families into which my profession introduced me in London. I envied them, and in desperation I sought to find solitude here.

Fate has ordained it otherwise. I have met with friends ; a faint shadow of what once was mine illumines my inner life, and makes my pulse beat quicker with hope—may it not prove my greater ruin. I stood upon the platform of a London station waiting till the train should start. There was a figure standing near me, tall and graceful ; I watched it ; the head turned, and Elsa's features were before me. My heart bounded.

Could it be that Elsa had not died, but had grown up, and now stood beside me? Wild fancy that it was; I cherished it but for a few brief moments, and then the delusion vanished. It was not Elsa, but one who reawakened in my breast feelings long grown cold—feelings that made my blood run warmer through my veins, and my heart beat at the sound of a woman's voice.

Fond dreams gladdened my nights. I looked forward to each day, and welcomed with enthusiasm every hour spent in her company; she spoke to me of home, of country, and smiled on me till my very existence was lost in ecstasy. Can you doubt who this second Elsa is? Will not your own heart tell you the exile sees happiness through you, and that it is your eyes, your presence that would make the dull world a boyish dream again? There is pity in the look that reads these lines; pause—could it never ripen into love? Oh, if you knew half the longing with which I pen these lines, if I could but inspire you with half my love for you, I should be happy, but I must wait and tremble.

There is an eye watching the flicker of your lamp as you sit reading this, for I feel that you will open it whilst alone in your room; I hope it may be so, and if I am right, judge the anxious watcher kindly, and attribute an over zeal to the longing of a heart as true as ever beat in man, The stars shine on me as I write, and the clear

moonbeam peers at me through the window. I love them, for they shine on you ; would that they could bear my message in words as beautiful as they are, that your heart might be touched, and that you might smile on me when next we meet.

Pardon this rhapsody, I fear lest my words may frighten you, but be assured this is the last time I will ever trouble you again. Should you reject my suit, I leave this place directly. May God guide me to a speedy deliverance from this world's pain ; but should you not, I dare not picture to myself the happiness that would lie before me ; I cannot let my thoughts dwell upon it ; it is too like a dream, and mine have all flown from me one by one.

Elsa, my guardian angel, shine on me this night from yonder brilliant star, speak to her I love, and whisper soft sighs into her heart, that she may pity the exile and love him for your sake. Tell her to be kind to him as you were, and so lead him on, that he may forget all in her, and love life and human beings because they bear her form. Tell her of his struggles, and of the weary yearnings of his heart, that he has been friendless upon earth, and that he never loved aught but his fairy sister till she crossed his path. Oh, Elsa, be kind, and as you smiled on me, and murmured "brother" with your dying lips, so now in your spirit form visit her, and whisper "Ebert" in her ear, till she loves the name, and turns to bless him with a

human love, that will guide him on through the dark mazes of this world.

Maud Erving, can it never be? Grant me your answer from your own lips, it is all I ask, and till then I wait in patience, but with what hope and fear!

EBERT PORSKINSKI.

There were tears in Maud's eye as she laid the manuscript on the table, and burying her head in both hands, she strove to think, but a sense of sorrow possessed her, she could not shape it into thoughts. An hour passed away, and still she sat there; she had not moved, but a slow, irregular breathing showed she was asleep; confusion of thoughts had become dreams, and Count Porskinski had changed. It was Captain Macklaren that had penned those lines, and her heart beat for joy.

Bang! a book fell from the table; she started up alarmed, looked about her, seized the letter and read the name again—a shade of disappointment crossed her brow.

“It was from Count Porskinski. Why does he care for me?” and Maud turned to seek her couch with a feeling of oppression at her heart she could not conquer.

There is no greater pang than that of unavoidably giving pain to others.

CHAPTER XIX.

A PARTING.

“ I HAVE had a note from Lydia Carpenter, Maud, she is very ill, and begs me to come and visit her. I shall not be absent very long, you will not miss me.”

“ Yes, I cannot do otherwise, dear aunt Lucy,” and Maud burst into tears. Miss Massing was greatly alarmed.

“ What is the matter, are you ill ?”

“ No, not at all ; I am only foolish, so very foolish,” said Maud, trying to smile through her tears, but it was no use, and she went crying on as if her heart would break.

“ Do let me send for something, this excess of crying must be from weakness. You distress me, I cannot help crying too. What does it all mean ?”

“ I want to tell you ; but it is so difficult to find words, and I am so very sorry.”

“ Have you had bad news this morning from London ? Is your uncle ill ? I must know, for

you have frightened me so much, I cannot help trembling all over."

"I have only had a letter from the Count."

"The Count! what Count?" ejaculated Miss Massing, looking as if she knew quite well, but did not like to anticipate matters.

"From Count Porskinski. Such a beautiful letter; the history of his whole life. It is so melancholy."

"Oh!" said Miss Massing. She could say no more, for she was utterly puzzled as to what was to follow.

"You had better read my translation of it, for I do not think I could explain all. May I go and fetch it?"

Miss Massing acquiesced, and Maud left the room.

"Poor child! she is in love with him," thought the old lady, when left alone; "people always cry when they are in love. I suppose it is part of the disease."

She read the letter through, and was much affected by it. Maud could not see her face, for she held the paper so as to hide it, and a convulsive twitch was all that showed how the hot tears were chasing each other down the kind old cheeks. When she had read it twice carefully through, she put it down, and held out her arms to her niece. Maud flew to her and kissed the tears away.

“I congratulate you, my dear Maud,” murmured the old lady.

“No, you must not—you must not!”

“Why? I do not wonder at your loving him. this letter would break a heart of stone.”

“But I do not love, and that is why I cry.”

“You do not?” and a shade of pleasure crossed Miss Massing’s face. She thought of Captain Macklaren, but she was ashamed of herself for doing so, and added, hastily—

“Poor Count Porskinski!”

“Yes, I am so very, very sorry. But what can I do?”

“You know best, my dear. I am the worst person in the world to give advice. I suppose you must refuse him.”

Maud could not restrain a smile at her aunt’s simple perplexity, and said—

“It is so difficult, I do not know how.”

“Perhaps I ought to see him,” said Miss Massing, looking very blank at the prospect.

“No, he begged me to speak to him for the last time, and I will.”

“That is very kind of you, just what I should have expected. You are so clear headed, Maud, one would think you had had the experience of three lives. If I were in your place, I could not help accepting him, he is so handsome, and loves you so much; but then, to be sure, you have

another interest, which will keep you to your purpose. You could not easily forget Captain.....”

Suddenly recollecting that she was not supposed to suspect anything in that quarter, she paused, and did not even dare to look at her niece, whose cheeks were suffused with blushes.

“I mean,” continued Miss Massing, awkwardly, “your sense of what is right will support you. I do not think I can go to Lydia this morning. You are not in a fit state for solitude.”

“Oh, yes, it will do me good to be alone; besides, I must have an interview with the Count. Would it be improper to send for him to see me here?”

“Well, really—perhaps it would not be right. It is so high up in the house, people might say you were engaged, and that would be very awkward, you know.”

“I will leave our interview to chance, then,” said Maud, evidently relieved at the prospect of delay.

“Yes,” said Miss Massing. “I should not like it said that I receive gentlemen in my private sitting-room. People are apt to make remarks, and although they mean nothing by it, still reports are spread which are unpleasant, and more particularly as I have you staying with me. Captain—I mean Lady Macklaren, might hear of it, and a foolish joke might lead to mistakes where they are most to be avoided.”

“ I do not know what you are alluding to, aunt Lucy,” said Maud, rather pettishly.

“ Perhaps it is better you should not know just yet ; it will all come in time, and I shall be very pleased when it does happen ; I have arranged it all in my own mind. But we must not talk any more now, as I am to go and see poor Lydia. The doctor says she is very ill ; that nasty cough, I do not like to hear it.”

Miss Massing left her niece sitting by the open window, wondering what would happen, and why her aunt should suspect anything with regard to Captain Macklaren. She felt as if they had no right to think anything about it, and was angry at their supposing she could be in love with any one in the world. Why did she think of her aunt in the plural ? she knew Lady Macklaren had been talking to her about it, and if she had, it was evident she liked the idea. A blush of pleasure crossed Maud’s face at the very thought. Just then a knock at the door roused her from her reverie, and she mechanically said—

“ Come in.” Her summons was obeyed, and Count Porskinski stood before her.

He had waited impatiently all the morning ; Maud had not appeared for breakfast ; he had not even caught sight of her dress to cheer him ; Miss Bridges had devoted herself to amuse him, he had listened abstractedly to her conversation, and had given many wrong answers, without her being any

the wiser. Eleven o'clock came, Count Porskinski grew more impatient. He heard Miss Massing leave the house, and watched her retreating figure till she was out of sight. Here was an opportunity, Maud was doubtless alone in her sitting-room; why should he not attempt to gain admission? he could but be refused; the temptation was too great, and with a beating heart, he stood before her door. He heard her voice, he entered, and stood erect before her.

Maud rose; she trembled violently, and her tongue refused to form one word. They confronted each other in silence, but she dared not raise her eyes to his. He was the first to speak.

"Thank you for thus receiving me," said the Count; there was no hope in his tone, only deep melancholy. "I presume, from your manner, that it is the last time we shall ever meet. Forgive the past; pardon the devotion which caused me to pen those lines, and remember me only as a dream, which was short and painful while it lasted, but left no trace behind."

"Do not say that. I can never forget this dream, and shall pity and respect you to my dying day."

"Kind words, from a kind heart, but they cannot soothe me now. I must wander through this world alone, and see others pluck the roses that wither at my touch."

"You look on life too gloomily," gasped Maud,

trying in vain to prevent her voice from trembling. "You will meet other friends more worthy of you. Go back to your country and seek a bride from amongst your own people; a second Elsa waits you there."

"The English may love twice, the Germans never." And as he said this, he folded his arms, turning his large, thoughtful eyes dreamily on Maud, who, feeling she ought to speak, murmured—

"I am so sorry."

For a moment he smiled bitterly, but checking himself, he said—

"You have nothing to make you grieve."

"But the thought of paining others," and Maud bent down her head to conceal her tears.

"Such grief is but momentary. It is the life-long hope destroyed, that makes the soul bleed, and the whole being writhe in anguish."

"An active life would dissipate even such grief as that you speak of. Return to Poland, stir up its people to shake off their ignoble yoke; your own sorrows will be drowned in the common woe. You have nothing to lose, and all to gain—go and prosper. Your fame will one day ring throughout the world, and mothers will teach their infants to bless your name. Is such ambition not great enough to move you?"

"And if I fail?"

"The consciousness that you have lived and

suffered for your country would make even a dungeon sweet."

"When first you spoke to me of this, you spoke in vain. Earth had still its charms to enthrall me; now all is changed, the vision that brightened even exile has faded. I will go—I will seek my old home, my friends will spurn me from their doors, but I will go and venture all. Your spirit will haunt me in the hour of danger, and with my dying lips I will bless the words that consigned me to a living tomb, for I shall fail. Think of a prisoner sometimes when you walk in freedom; think of four narrow walls, so close around him that they seem to weigh upon his very brain and crush it in; think that a ray from the outer world breaks in upon him, and dances on his prison walls, bidding him look back upon some few sunny scenes and people his little world with figures who are kind and speak to him as you have done; think thus, and that prisoner will bless you in his dungeon, and pray that peace may be your portion through life, and that no shadow may ever fall on you to crush your bright spirit to the ground."

Maud had raised her head, and when he ceased speaking, she held out her hands to him, with tears in her eyes, and said—

"Do not go—I was mistaken; I am foolish and ignorant. Do not think of what I said—it does not deserve a second thought."

He raised her hand to his lips, and said—

“Your words are engraven on my heart. I go to my country; it will be happiness to fail in the cause of freedom, even if Siberia be my doom.”

Maud shuddered, withdrew her hand, saying, hurriedly—

“You must judge for the best, but I shall ever repent having uttered those hasty words.”

“We must part,” said Count Porskinski, sadly. “I will not detain you longer; another hour and these doors will be closed on me for ever. May I ask you to burn that letter which now lies open on your table?”

Maud took it up. “It is too beautiful to burn. German is understood by so few that it will be in safe keeping in my hands. You do not refuse this?”

Count Porskinski looked his thanks, and moving rapidly to the door, he would have disappeared, but paused with his hand on the lock, and, turning to take one last look, he waved his left hand in token of adieu, and was gone. Maud would have recalled him, she felt as if she had doomed a human being to a life, the misery of which she could not fathom, but she remained standing in the place where he had left her, unable to think or even move. Sorrow and danger paralyse some, whilst they nerve others to action. Maud had no presence of mind or energy at those times when it is most needed, and she frequently said what she did not mean, and

lived to repent her hasty words in secret for days, nay, sometimes even for years.

It was with an aching heart that she again seated herself by the window, and, taking up a book, tried to read ; her thoughts were far away, and hot tears blotted each page as she turned it over. An hour passed and still Miss Massing had not appeared ; Maud heard voices on the stairs—a footstep came along the passage, and paused before her door ; she knew who it was and her heart beat quicker, but the step passed on ; she heard it slowly descend the stairs and the front door open and shut. An irrepressible curiosity seized her, she rose and leaned out of the window ; a tall figure stood upon the parade in a travelling costume, the head was raised and her eyes encountered those of Count Porskinski. She never saw him again ; many hundreds of miles were, ere long, to separate their destinies.

“ Water, water ! ” cried the voice of Mrs. Blount upon the staircase. “ How dreadful ! what shall I do ? Miss Briggs, come directly or she will die.”

Fearing lest something dreadful had occurred, Maud flew to the door, and scarce an instant had elapsed before she stood by Mrs. Blount, who was supporting her friend, Miss Bridges.

“ Who are you ? ” cried the former lady, in great agitation. “ Take her from me ; I am not strong enough to hold her. She will kill me.”

Maud advanced and took the drooping head of the unfortunate Miss Bridges upon her knee. She had fainted away, and lay as motionless as one dead.

"Have you no smelling salts?" asked Maud. "Ring for the servant; where is Miss Briggs?"

"Here I am, my dear," said that kind old lady. "Do not frighten yourselves; she will soon be better."

"No, I shall not," murmured the supposed unconscious lady, in a feeble voice.

"She has not fainted quite away, thank heaven!" exclaimed Maud, greatly relieved at hearing her burden speak.

"Yes, I have, quite away," continued Miss Bridges, opening her eyes languidly, and turning up the whites.

"Drink a little water, it will do you good," and Miss Briggs held a glass to the patient's mouth.

"I cannot swallow. I cannot do anything," was the only rejoinder.

"Might I ask you, Miss Erving, to stand by her a few minutes? I must go and see if Count Porskinski....."

A scream at the mention of this name prevented Miss Briggs from completing her sentence, and Miss Bridges went into hysterical convulsions of a most peculiar kind.

"The wretched creature! the base deceiver!" and such ejaculations burst from her lips, inter-

mingled with wild upbraidings of the most extravagant description.

“Calm yourself, my dear Miss Bridges. You must really try to command yourself, or you will be ill,” said the mistress of the house, greatly perplexed as to what would be best to do.

“He has gone away, and will never—never return. Oh, dear, how can I be calm!” and a succession of piteous shrieks followed, till Miss Bridges, utterly exhausted, lay panting on the ground.

“We must carry her to her room; this exhibition is most disgraceful!” said Miss Briggs, in a whisper, to Maud. “Some person might possibly call, and my house would get a bad name.”

The servants were accordingly summoned, and the unfortunate Miss Bridges carried to her own apartment in a state of great exhaustion.

“If that is love,” thought Maud, “may I never be touched with the tender sentiment. What an absurd exhibition!” and turning from Mrs. Blount, who lay, with her eyes closed upon the sofa, muttering something about nerves and agitation, she left the sitting-room, and sought to compose her thoughts in the retirement of her own chamber.

Miss Massing hurried to the bedside of her young friend, and the sight of her pale, sickly face soon banished all thoughts of the foreign Count and his pathetic letter to her niece.

“How kind of you to come to me,” said Lydia.

"I have been longing to speak to you, and am more thankful than I can say that they have not forbidden me to see you."

"I am very glad," said Miss Massing, taking her hand; "but tell me how you are; it made me so anxious to hear that you were confined to your bed."

"I am better to-day, but my cough is troublesome, and I was very tired yesterday. Mr. Pipkin was brought in to talk to me; he did not like the office, I am sure, for he never alluded to religious matters till poor mamma came in. He looks upon me as a Roman Catholic. I had great difficulty in keeping my temper with him, and the effort and excitement tired me so much that I have persuaded kind old Dr. Mordant to order that I should only see the people I ask for. Mamma is, I fear, angry with me, but I could not have borne to see that man day after day; he is very good, I have no doubt, but the very sight of him used to irritate me in my best days."

"Is that my Lydia?" asked Miss Massing, reproachfully.

"I am afraid it is; but you must make some allowance for me now; a cough is very bad for the temper, they say. How is Maud? I should like to see her some day when she is passing our door."

"I am sure she will be delighted to come. I left her rather agitated this morning with a letter she had received, but she is quite well."

“I am glad of that ; but it is about her that I want particularly to speak to you. Mr. Pipkin alarmed me very much yesterday, by repeating the current reports in the town about.....” A fit of coughing prevented her speaking for a few minutes.

Miss Massing changed colour, and thoughts of the Count rushed like lightning through her mind. Could anything have been remarked ? Was she accused of heartless conduct ? or was the Count not what he seemed, but only a foreign adventurer ?

Lydia recovered herself in a few minutes, and continued in an earnest tone—

“Reports are generally founded on truth, though what is in itself originally quite innocent, is frequently made to appear bad by repetition, and, consequently, addition, for no news ever passed from person to person without being greatly embellished.” Again Lydia paused for breath.

“You make me very anxious,” said Miss Massing. “Pray tell me what report says.”

“Yes, I was going to do so, but you must forgive these long pauses ; I am not strong. Mr. Pipkin tells me there are strange reports as to this Lord Reynoldforde ; they say he gambles every night at a common billiard-house in the town, and that he is constantly in the company of a Frenchman who calls himself the Marquis de Montanvert. No one believes that he is really a nobleman. They say he is engaged to Miss Farncourt, and that he

has a wife in Paris, from whom he has long been separated."

Miss Massing held up her hands in horror, but indignation soon took the place of disgust.

"How wicked people are to spread such reports. It was only the day before yesterday that I spent a most charming evening on board the 'Firefly.' Lord Reynoldforde was all kindness and hospitality, and I am charmed that Maud should have such nice acquaintances. Pray contradict all such assertions; it is absurd to suppose a gentleman in Lord Reynoldforde's position should gamble in a paltry little town like this. I think it is quite laughable; how can people invent such things? they must be badly off for gossip."

"Dear Miss Massing, I should be very sorry to upset your faith in the goodness of any one, but these reports are circulated on good authority. Mr. Pipkin is a charitable person, and I would not doubt his word, although I do not admire him in general. He says positively that he was called up to visit a dying person in one of the small houses I have just mentioned, and that he heard voices speaking in French, and a minute afterwards was passed by Lord Reynoldforde on the stairs."

"He mistook the person."

"No, I fear not; he has seen him several times, and he says that Lord Reynoldforde tried to avoid him."

"He only knows him by sight, and has never

spoken to him. Mr. Pipkin is quite capable of making mistakes. I do not wish to believe your story, Lydia; it is too dreadful to be believed. Please say nothing more about it. I would rather try and forget such things."

"But if it were proved to be true, would you like to think your niece had associated with such a family?"

"Nothing is said against poor Miss Farncourt, and *if* her father is such a villain, as report would make him out to be, why then she must need a friend to comfort her, and I trust Maud will prove a true one to the poor young creature. A disreputable lover and a father who gambles! It is too bad. I will never believe it."

"Suppose then that Maud should realise an attachment for this young Frenchman, not knowing of his engagement, for it is kept a secret, what should you do then?"

"You speak of an impossibility. The Marquis is twice her age in the first place; and in the second, he avoids Maud as if he disliked her."

"Forgive me for having raised these suspicions. I would not have done it had I not felt great interest in your niece; and when one lies still in bed, one broods over all that has been said, and I made myself so anxious last night that I could not rest till I had seen you, and told you all I knew. Have you been acquainted with this family for any length of time?"

“ Maud was at school with Miss Farncourt, and Mademoiselle Lafoure, their French governess, is Blanche’s companion this summer. It was very pleasant for Maud to meet her, as she was much attached to her schoolmistress.”

“ Yes, it must have been,” said Lydia, abstractedly. “ Do you think her a nice person ?”

Miss Massing looked vexed, and said rather crossly—

“ You are extremely suspicious this morning, Lydia ; it is so unlike you to be so. I do not know what to make of it all.”

“ You must not be angry with me. If you only knew how vexed I was to feel myself obliged to tell you of all this, you would not judge me harshly. It was this, more than anything, that made me so much worse last night.”

“ I think Mr. Pipkin might have kept his gossip to himself, when visiting a sick room.”

“ I dare say he did not know the effect it would have—clergymen are not doctors,” said Lydia, smiling ; “ and I have had such good health up to this time, and have lived such an active life, that confinement to one room makes me pettish. I hope I shall soon get used to it, for it may be many weeks before I put foot on the ground again, if I ever do. You know what my disease is.”

Miss Massing turned very pale, and stooping down, she kissed Lydia’s forehead.

“ We will not talk of it, dear,” she said.

“ I like to speak about myself ; all invalids do, you know, and as you are so kind as to visit me, you must let me tell you all I feel, as my world now is in this room, and whenever I look up my eyes rest on that ominous looking mixture to be taken when the cough is troublesome ; it makes me think of myself if nothing else did. Do you see that beautiful fuschia in the window sill ? it was papa’s present to me this morning ; was it not kind of him ?”

“ Very ; it is no merit to be kind to you, Lydia, I do not think any one could be otherwise.”

“ Perhaps it is my own fault when they are,” and the sick girl sighed heavily.

Neither spoke for some moments. Lydia was the first to break the silence, and taking Miss Massing’s hand, she said—

“ Would you mind using your influence with papa in making him relent in his determination not to let me have the consolation of Mr. Montague’s visits ? They would be of such inestimable benefit to me now ; I do so long to see and talk with him. Perhaps they would not object to Mrs. Montague calling upon me now and then. Would you mind asking for me, dear Miss Massing ?”

The old lady looked somewhat perplexed ; she could not bear to be placed in a prominent position ; her own feelings bade her refuse this office, but her affection for Lydia prompted her to say “ yes,” and her kind nature conquered, and she accepted

the office of mediator, without any apparent dislike to it.

“ You are always ready to be kind to me,” said Lydia. “ It makes me quite ashamed to think that my revelations this morning should have pained you, yet I cannot wish them unsaid, although I have made you vexed with me.”

“ No, not with you, Lydia, with the gossips who spread such scandalous reports. It is that which vexes me. I am sure Mr. Pipkin must have learnt it all at one of his ladies’ meetings. Not that I wish to imply anything against my own sex. I am a great admirer of it, and wish but few things changed, still I do think these meetings are not good things from what I have heard. They encourage ill-natured gossiping, for the ladies have very little business to transact, and in talking over the poor people, they go on to speak of what they have heard; this is unintentionally exaggerated, and when they return home, each piece of gossip is repeated again and again, till it would take some time to reach the truth.”

Lydia laughed. “ I do not like these meetings either, so we shall not quarrel over them.”

Miss Massing looked at her watch, and expressed great surprise to find how late it was.

“ I must go,” she said, rising. “ Maud will be wondering what has become of me. I ought not to have left her so long. When will be the best time for me to have an interview with your father?”

Lydia proposed the afternoon, and Miss Massing promised to come on the very first opportunity.

“ You have forgiven me for what I have told you?” said Lydia. “ Do not think of it again, if you see only idle gossip in what I have said.”

“ I shall consult with Maud upon the matter. She may know more than I do, as she is better acquainted with Blanche ; but till I am convinced that Lord Reynoldforde is what report makes him out to be, I will not believe, nor will I prejudice Maud against her friend’s father.”

“ Come and see me again before very long ; your visits do me good. I shall be so anxious to hear the result of your interview with my father.”

“ I am only too glad to have any excuse to visit you, dear Lydia. You may depend on my coming on the very first opportunity. Good by, take great care of yourself, and attend to orders, we shall soon have you amongst us again. Poor Blanche ! I cannot help feeling anxious about her, if what you said should be true. I must not believe it.”

Lydia watched her leave the room with a sigh, a voice within her said, “ You will never rise from this couch again.” She believed the voice, and sighed, not so much that she grieved to leave the world, but the thought of a long parting from her friends was most painful, even to her resigned disposition.

END OF VOLUME I.



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